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SERMONS.

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SERMONS

BY

SIR HENRY MONCREIFF WELLWOOD, BART.

D. D. AND F. R. S. EDINBURGH.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF ST CUTHBERT'S, EDINBURGH;

AND SENIOR CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY IN SCOTLAND

TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS, THE

PRINCE OF WALES.

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1805.

TO
THE CONGREGATION
OF
THE CHURCH OF ST CUTHBERT'S,

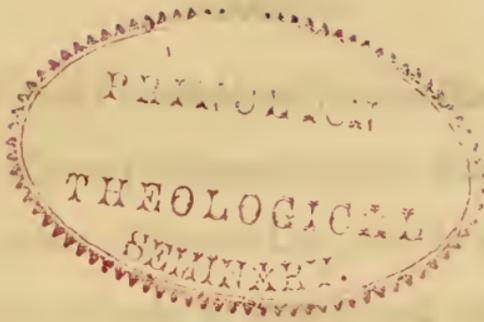
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P R E F A C E.

THE writers of sermons have some disadvantages to combat which no other authors experience in the same degree.

The subjects, to which they solicit the attention of the public, cannot be new; and, at this late period of the Christian Church, even novelty of illustration is scarcely to be expected.

But, were it easy to surmount the prejudices of those, to whom novelty is the first attraction; or possible to disarm the severity of fastidious criticism, the writers of sermons have to encounter

an obstacle still more formidable. There is a persuasion which very generally prevails among some classes of men, and especially among those who have the least reason to adopt it, that every thing which a sermon can contain is already familiar to them ; and that it is equally unprofitable and unpleasant, to bestow their attention on subjects, of which they have long had sufficient information.

This prejudice is unhappily supported by the resistance given to the influence of religion, by the passions and the spirit of the world. He who is unwilling to subject himself to the obligations of Christianity, is certainly ill-prepared to receive satisfaction from truths or admonitions, which contradict the habits of his life: And those who derive their happiness from sources very remote from religion, readily find reasons for pronouncing that to be unnecessary or use-

less, which they have always found by experience, to be an ungrateful or an irksome task.

But if the writers of Sermons labour under these difficulties, there are other considerations which will be admitted to have some effect to counterbalance them.

The subjects, which they profess to discuss, are of perpetual importance to mankind, and involve their most permanent interests. And though the truths of religion are always the same, the manners of the world and the characters of men, to which they ought to be applied, are subject to perpetual variations. Though the same doctrines and duties are inculcated in the present age, which were preached in the age of the apostles; and though nothing can be added either to their substance or to their authority; it is of the last importance to direct them to the consciences of

men in every age, and to their living manners : To combat the circumstances which rise in succession to obstruct their influence, and to take advantage of the variety of facts and events, which occur in the progress of human affairs, by which they can be enforced or illustrated.

Though persuasion is in general more the aim of Sermons than direct information, a great proportion of the knowledge which the people at large possess, they certainly acquire by means of the christian institutions for public instruction. Those who are most disinclined to the perusal of sermons, and who affect to consider the topics to which they relate, either as unimportant or as already familiar to them, are not seldom the persons who stand most in need of the admonitions which they contain. Though an author should not be able to give them novelty, either of subject or of illustration, if he is only success-

ful in stating clearly and forcibly, to their conviction, the duties of religion in connection with their legitimate motives, his labours must be allowed, by every wise and dispassionate man, to possess an utility, altogether independent of the science and learning, which may distinguish the period of the world in which he writes.

The author of the following Sermons presumes not to think, that they have any peculiar claims to the attention of the public. He addresses them chiefly to the congregation, for whom they were originally prepared. Of the thirty-four years during which he has held the office of a minister, he has officiated during thirty among them. To promote their present and eternal interests ought to be the object of his life: And, accustomed, as they are, to his manner of stating the doctrines and the duties of religion, he allows himself to believe, that, among them this volume will neither be useless nor unacceptable.

He trusts he has as much purity of intention, as to be more solicitous for the usefulness, than for the reputation or popularity of his book. But he has at least endeavoured to render the language and arrangement perspicuous, and, when they have occurred to him, to avoid provincial peculiarities; though perhaps in many instances without success. He is sensible indeed, that a provincial ear (if that expression can be allowed) has frequently misled him, and he did not perceive some of the mistakes which it has occasioned, till it was too late to correct them.

It will be observed, that in two or three of the following sermons, some of the same topics are incidentally introduced. Of this the author is fully aware; and it was in some degree unavoidable, in sermons prepared at very different times. But, if he is not mistaken, in the few

instances in which the same truths are repeated, the illustrations are not the same, nor the purposes to which they are applied.

With regard to the subjects illustrated in this volume, he has only to add, that it has been his chief object; to represent the doctrines and the duties of christianity as inseparably united, in the faith and practice of those who embrace it. Practical religion is of much more importance than the solution of difficult questions; and the sanctification and salvation of those who profess to believe the gospel, than the soundest opinions.

H. M. W.

Edinburgh, February 13. 1805.



CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

On the Unequal Allotments of Providence.

I. COR. iv. 7.

Who maketh thee to differ from another? Page 1.

SERMON II.

On the Minute Improvement of the Blessings of Providence.

St JOHN. vi. 12.

Jesus said to his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. - - - Page 38.

SERMON III.

On Self-Denial.

St LUKE, ix. 23.

Jesus said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. - - - Page 70.

CONTENTS.

SERMON IV.

On the Form of Godliness.

II. TIMOTHY, iii. 5.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. - - - - Page 102.

SERMON V.

On Christian Faith and Morality.

PHILIPPIANS, i. 27.

—That ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. - Page 135.

SERMON VI.

On the Result of Good and of Bad Affections.

ECCLESIASTES, ix. 6.

Their love and their hatred and their envy is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. - Page 168.

SERMON VII.

On the Inheritance of a Good Man's Children.

PROVERBS, xiii. 22.

A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children. - - - - - Page 203.

SERMON VIII.

On the Doctrine of Grace.

ROMANS, v. 20.

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.
Page 235.

CONTENTS.

SERMON IX.

On the Conduct of Providence to Good Men.

ROMANS, viii. 28.

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose. - - - - - Page 272.

SERMON X.

On the General Spirit and Effects of Christianity.

LUKE, vii. 19. 21. 22.

And John calling unto him two of his disciples, sent them unto Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come, or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering, said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised; to the poor the gospel is preached. - - - - - Page 305.

SERMON XI.

On the Universal Promulgation of Christianity.

MATTHEW, xxiv. 14.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come. - - - - - Page 356.

SERMON XII.

The same subject continued, from the same text. Page 377.

CONTENTS.

SERMON XIII.

Prospects of Futurity.

MATTHEW, xxvii. 29.

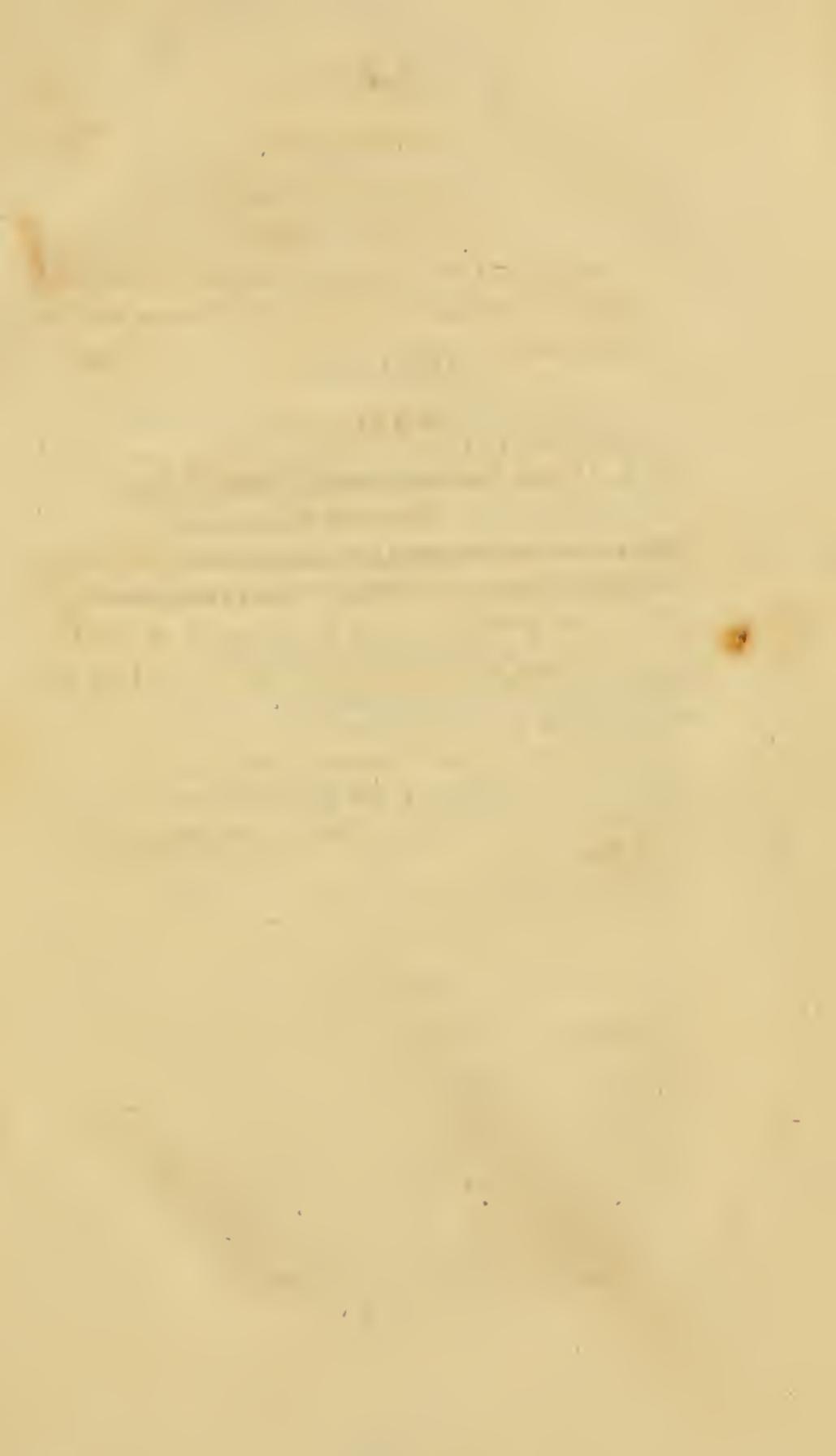
I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. - - - - Page 413.

SERMON XIV.

On the Cultivation of Personal Religion.

JUDE, 20. 21.

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life. - - - Page 448.



ERRATA.

- Page 23. Line 3. 4. 5. 11. 17. For *ten* read *five*, and for *five* read *two*.
65. In the running title, for *of Providence* read *of Fidelity*.
108. Line 10. From the bottom, for *socitey* read *society*.
204. Last line, For *convey them* read *convey to them*.
244. Bottom of the page, for *Rom. xviii. 32.* read *Rom. viii. 32.*
245. Line 11. Delete *he*.
251. Bottom, for *Luke, xix. 19.* read *Luke xix. 38.*
285. Line 3. For *situation* read *situations*.
365. Line 7. For *useful. Or,* read *useful: Or,*
437. Bottom, For *1. Thes. i. 19. 20.* read *1. Thes. ii. 19. 20.*
447. Ditto, For *St John, xvi. 2.* read *St John, xiv. 23.*
476. Line 4. from the bottom, for *favour of God,* read *power of
God.*



SERMON I.

ON

THE UNEQUAL ALLOTMENTS OF
PROVIDENCE.

1 CORINTHIANS, iv. 7.

“Who maketh thee to differ from another?”

THERE is no blessing of nature, of providence, or of religion, which mankind have ever possessed, which has not been unequally bestowed on them.

All the plans of Providence, and every portion of the knowledge or advantages imparted to men, have been laid open by degrees: One district of the world enjoying an extent of information, or of prosperity, from which the neighbouring countries have been completely excluded: the same people possessing more in one

age, than they have been permitted to transmit to the ages following : and one generation of men pursuing their advantages far beyond the limits which had been prescribed to their fathers.

Even the dispensations of religion, and the revelations of God for the instruction and salvation of mankind, have, in the wisdom of heaven, been published and perfected by many degrees, through successive ages. They were at first, in a great measure, confined to the promises which were given to the patriarchs. They were afterwards more minutely unfolded to Moses and the prophets, who “ testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow *.” Almost every portion of substantial knowledge on the subject was confined for ages to one country of the world ; while, for aught we know, the people of every other district blindly followed their idolatries. A general promulgation of the doctrines of revelation was not permitted till “ the fulness of time ” predicted, when the Son of God was sent from

* 1 Peter, i 11.

heaven to become "a light to enlighten the Gentiles," and "salvation to the ends of the earth."

From that time the gospel was preached "for the faith of all nations;" though it has been received with very different degrees of advantage in different countries, and has not, even at this remote period, reached every habitation of men. It was early, and almost entirely, withdrawn from the countries in which it was first planted; and has been withheld from many generations of those whose fathers had once received it.

A minute attention to the history of the world would suggest to us an immense variety of facts, to demonstrate, That the distribution of advantages, civil and religious, has been universally unequal; and has been subject to perpetual variations in every age and country. Successive generations have lived and died in the worst and in the best conditions of human life; the objects of the most limited or of the most liberal distribution of the gifts of providence; following the most abject superstitions, or receiving the knowledge of salvation from Christ and his apostles, "to guide their feet into the way of peace."

The same fact may be stated from the circumstances of individuals, even when their external situations are extremely similar: From the diversity in their original talents and dispositions; from the advantages or the defects of their early education; from the local or the domestic blessings which they possess, or which are not allotted them; from the prosperity or the calamities which accompany their progress through life; from the grace which is given them, or which they do not attain.

The unequal distribution of the gifts of God is a fact impressively written on every condition of human life, on the personal endowments of men, and on all their observation and experience.

There are few subjects, to which we apply our understandings, in which we can attempt to do more, than to ascertain the facts on which they depend, and to deduce from them the practical lessons which they ought to teach us.

It is impossible for us to know, and in vain to inquire, why God has given a clearer revelation to the later than to the earlier ages; or

better blessings to one country than to another ; or greater advantages, or more special grace, to one individual than to his neighbour.

But the practical instruction resulting from the facts, which ought to determine our personal conduct, is equally obvious and forcible. It is naturally suggested to us by the question stated in the text, “ Who hath made thee to differ from another ? ”

The consideration of the authority, under which we receive and possess whatsoever distinguishes our conditions, goes deep into the duties and obligations of the present life, and leads our thoughts directly to the ultimate account, which shall be required of our conduct.

I shall endeavour to illustrate the practical instruction which the question in this text ought to bring home to us, by shewing,

1. That the consideration of the authority of God, under which we are all equally placed, notwithstanding the variety in our conditions, ought to teach us an implicit acquiescence in the duties and in the lot assigned us.

2. That our obligation to cultivate, and our danger from the perversion of the blessings we

have received, are exactly the same, whatever our portion of advantages is. And,

3. That the sentence, which shall at last be pronounced on our conduct at the tribunal of God, will have a special relation to the advantages which have been given, or have been denied us; and to the condition in which every individual has served God, or has sinned against him. I am to shew

1. That the consideration of the authority of God, under which we are all equally placed, notwithstanding the variety in our conditions, ought to teach us an implicit acquiescence in the duties and in the lot assigned us.

There is no situation of human life, which has not its peculiar disadvantages or hardships. While we perceive the blessings which are denied to us, and are given to others, or experience the difficulties from which they are exempted, we are in danger of indulging a dissatisfaction, or a chagrin, very unsuitable to our dependence on the government of God. “Why should I be doomed to perpetual toil and labour, (will the querulous spirit sometimes say) to procure bread to myself or to my children; while my

neighbour has only to enjoy that which others have provided for him, and has no fear that his resources shall fail?" Or, "Why have I been placed in a situation which has effectually debarred me from the opportunities of acquiring the knowledge, or the wealth, or the success in life, so liberally bestowed on the family of my neighbour? Why should my duties constantly lie, where I have every thing to suffer, and little to expect; among those who can make me no return, or who are themselves the instruments of the severity of my lot? Why should the duties of this life be allowed to press so hard on me, to whom so small a portion is allotted of its comforts or advantages; while the duties of those around me are attached to situations in which they are supported by associates, who add to their resources, and cheer their habitations, enjoying blessings which they have not earned, or the calm satisfactions of domestic life?"

Questions such as these, which the querulousness or impatience of individuals suggests to them, from the unequal allotment of situations which cannot be the same, are completely answered to

a man of deliberate reflection, by a single question opposed to them : “ Who hath made thee to differ from thy neighbour ? ” Not the will of man, or his arrangements ; not the caprice or the injustice of the world. The Almighty Creator and Lord of heaven and earth hath given thee thy place, and selected thy duties ; he “ who hath made of one blood all the nations of men,—and hath determined the bounds of their habitations ; ” to whose purpose every creature is subservient. Thy neighbour’s blessings and his prosperity are his gifts ; and so is every thing which softens thy sorrow, which comforts thy dwelling, which alleviates thy burden, which helps thy infirmities, or which cheers thy labours. It is impossible to murmur against him, who must have the entire distribution of his own gifts ; who regulates and proportions them by the rules of infinite wisdom, and by means and ends unsearchable to us ; and whose tender mercies predominate in the worst conditions of human life.

The universality of unequal distribution, attested by the indelible memorials of every age and country, takes away every source of indivi-

dual complaint ; and ought to teach us the most entire acquiescence in our personal lot.

The private circumstances of men are not to be considered merely in the separate or disjointed forms in which they affect their personal feelings. They constitute an essential part of one general and extended plan with regard to the intelligent creation, carried on by the wisdom and sovereignty of God, from the beginning of ages to the end of time.

When we fix our attention on this point, we feel that we are, in our own situations, appointed to become "fellow workers together with God," to promote or to be subservient to the ends of his universal government, by means of our individual fidelity : And we must be conscious that the diversity, both of our conditions and of our talents, must subsist, till the duties of our several departments in the great plan of heaven shall be completed ; and till we shall be capable of a higher sphere of service, among those who have "finished their course" in succession before us.

This consideration ought to be sufficient to check every murmur as it rises, even though

we were able to perceive none of the reasons which determine the unequal allotments of providence.

But I add, that though a great part of the plan of providence is of necessity beyond our reach, we have as much knowledge of it as ought to convince us, that our acquiescence is as reasonable in itself, as it is essential to the subjection which we owe to God.

Every man's understanding informs him, that the duties of human life could never be fulfilled, if all men had the same offices, or the same place, or the same advantages; and that the diversity of gifts, of talents, and of situations, is adapted by the wisdom of God to the diversity of duties assigned to individual men. It is not less evident, that different characters, different dispositions, and different virtues, could neither be tried nor disciplined by the same means, or by the same duties, or in the same conditions. We can therefore have no more right to complain of the varieties in our lot, than of the obvious differences in our talents and capacities, or in the duties which we are required to fulfil. The diversity has in every instance the same

ultimate source, whatever the means or the instruments may be, by which it is ascertained or promoted. Though our situations are often varied and determined by our personal conduct, or by the conduct and the passions of other men, whom God employs as the instruments of his purpose, we are as much bound to submit to that which God permits in the general order of human affairs, as to acquiesce in that which he specially appoints; and have good reasons to believe, that the effect is in both cases subservient to the same ultimate end--the glory "of him who worketh all in all." "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee," says the Scripture; "the remainder of wrath thou wilt restrain *."

These examples may serve as specimens of the reasons of unequal distribution, which are not quite beyond our observation. A man, whose judgment is enlightened by his faith in God, may discern many others; and may follow much farther the minute relations which these bear to one another, and to the obligation

* Psalm lxxvi. 10.

which lies on his conscience to acquiesce implicitly in the lot assigned him.

Much must no doubt remain unknown, on a subject which resolves itself into the wisdom of God. Our imbecility or ignorance will always perplex us with difficulties, or with apparent contradictions, when we presumptuously attempt to fathom the depths of infinite perfections. But he, who clearly perceives that the unequal allotments of providence are demonstrated by facts, alike prominent and impressive in the dispensations of religion, and in the course of human life, will feel his indispensable obligation to repress every murmur as it rises ; to keep his mind steadily attached to the duties of his own place ; and to acquiesce with humility and reverence in the wisdom which is beyond his search. He cannot have a reason to complain of the inequality which affects himself, while he knows, on the one hand, that the greatest of all the gifts of God “ was hid from ages and generations,” was brought to light by many gradations, and has been withheld from multitudes of the human race, in the latest times : Or while he is conscious, on the other hand, that

it is a fact which no man's understanding will permit him to deny, that the same unequal distribution has adhered to the endowments of our nature, as well as to every blessing of this life, from the beginning of the world to the present time, in every nation under heaven, and in every family of the earth.

A good man's confidence in the plan of God, restrains and supersedes the anxiety of mind which would destroy his happiness, and leaves him only duties and obligations to fulfil; while it teaches him to commit the result of every thing to God, and to trust all his personal interests implicitly and devoutly in his hands.

We shall have another view of the practical instruction suggested in the text, by considering,

2. That, notwithstanding the inequality of distribution, our obligation to cultivate and our danger from the perversion of the blessings we have received, are exactly the same, whatever our portion of advantages is.

It is no argument against our obligation to fulfil our real duties, that we do not possess ci-

ther the opportunities or the talents of other men. Our duties ought to come home to our consciences, according to the authority which enforces them, and in proportion to the means which we possess of fulfilling them. If our means are limited, our duties have a precise correspondence to them; and our obligations are as indispensable, and are as inseparably attached to our situations when our advantages are few, as when we have received a thousand talents above our fellows. If we are destitute of the endowments which they possess, we are bound to consider, not why we have received so little, but how we shall be able to cultivate the full extent of the talents which have been given us; not why a difficult duty is assigned us, but how that difficult duty shall best be fulfilled; not why we hold a lower place, or have less knowledge, or more limited talents, or less prosperity, than other men; but how we shall most effectually render our place subservient to the glory of God, and to the useful and faithful application of the advantages which we possess. The obligation is precisely the same, whether we have

received much or little; and is in every instance equally indispensable.

On the other hand, the danger of perversion is also exactly the same, whatever our portion of advantages is. The neglect or abuse of the meanest endowments, and the violation of the duties of the lowest place, are followed by effects as real on the conduct of human life, and on its final results, as could have arisen from the perversion of the greatest talents, in the most distinguished conditions.

He who is unfaithful in the lowest offices obstructs the business and the duties of human life, with as much certainty, though not in the same degree, as he who violates the duties of the most conspicuous station; and the impartial Judge who has given to each his place, shall pronounce sentence on the guilt of both with the same severity, although with circumstances adapted to their separate obligations. "Every man shall ultimately bear his own burden;" "and there is no respect of persons with God." We shall answer to God for the least as well as for the greatest violations of our personal duties; and for the precise use to which our talents have

been applied, whether they have been many or few. On the other hand, if God shall accept our service in the lowest departments, or with the most limited advantages of human beings, we are as certain that its final consequence or result shall be eternal happiness in the kingdom of God, as we could have been, if our sphere of duty had been given us among prophets and apostles.

How impressive is the doctrine which brings home to us this persuasion! How effectually should it operate on our minds, to stir us up to godliness and to good works, and to stimulate or confirm our ardour in our personal duties; that nothing may be found to have been neglected, that nothing essential to them may be wanting, and that no advantage which ought to have been applied to them, may appear to have been lost when our probation shall be finished. How irresistible should the motive be, which this doctrine urges on our consciences, to persuade us to abide steadily by the place and by the duties assigned us, according to the intention of him who has selected them; whilst

we look forward to their final result and effects in the kingdom of God !

The interests of every individual are deeply involved in this view of the subject. We shall receive the result of the most inferior talents which we have faithfully used, with as much certainty as the effect of the greatest ; and shall as certainly suffer for the perversion of the least as of the best endowments. In like manner, those to whom God has given a superior understanding, or greater wealth, or more extensive talents, or more knowledge, or better opportunities, or more enlightened views, or stronger impressions of religion than have been vouchsafed to other men, have received all these advantages, as the means of discharging their personal duties, and of accomplishing their probation in this life : And the result of their conduct in the application of them must be eternal.

There is an awful admonition to prosperous men, contained in the parabolical address of Abraham to the rich man who “lifted up his eyes in hell.” “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things ; but now he is com-

forted, and thou art tormented *.” What an impressive lesson is this, to him whose cup is full, and whose probation is not yet completed ! To rouse him to a purer, to a more earnest, to a more faithful service than he has yet fulfilled ; to convince him of the responsibility under which his peculiar talents have placed him ; and to teach him to rest his satisfactions, far less in the possession of superior advantages, than in the attainment of the legitimate ends to which they ought to be applied.

He is happy, indeed, whom God has prospered on the earth, and blessed with many talents, if he has faithfully used them in the fear of God, and has neither received nor enjoyed them in vain. The use to which he has applied the station assigned him, creates a distinction for him, far greater than the mere possession of any advantages could have given him ; and to him the result is certain, and is permanent in the kingdom of heaven. His faith shall not fail when his strength is gone. He shall find his place where the faithful live for ever, and where “ they shine as the stars in the firmament of God.”

* Luke xvi. 25.

But it is impossible not to add, that he is truly wretched and debased, who follows out steadily or conscientiously no part of the service assigned him ; or who deliberately or habitually turns his capacities or his advantages, be they great or small, against his known and essential duties ; who, though he has possessed talents sufficient to have enabled him to glorify God in his own condition, has, with perhaps a few exceptions (as the worst of men will sometimes act from pure intentions), spent his life without principle, without fidelity, without usefulness, “without God, and without hope in the world.” Whatever his sphere of duty may be at present, his last portion must be given him among the most wretched of the human race. The term of probation is short, but its consequences last for ever.

There is still one branch of the subject remaining. I have to shew,

3. That the sentence which shall at last be pronounced on our conduct, at the tribunal of God, will have a special relation to the advantages which have been given, or have been de-

nied us, and to the condition in which every individual has served God, or has sinned against him.

Our original ideas of the perfections of God, and of his immutable justice, are sufficient to satisfy us, that our talents and advantages are in general the measure of our duties, and must have an intimate relation to the account which we shall render to God.

We go a step farther, when we consider the rules by which the principles of our nature lead us invariably to form our estimate of one another. We do not require from any man services which we are sensible he has not the means of fulfilling, or the use of talents which we know he does not possess. We do not judge with equal severity of the same defects in an ignorant and in a well-informed man; or take the same view of the extent of duties, common to both, which they have very different means of discharging. We distinguish exactly betwixt the ignorance which is invincible, and that kind of incapacity which is the effect of deliberate negligence and perversion. We estimate the fidelity of men, in all situations, by the oppor-

tunities which they might have used, and do not in any instance connect it with those which were entirely beyond their reach. As far as morality is concerned, the diversity of our talents is uniformly taken into our account, when we are judging among ourselves of good conduct or demerit.

The impressions of justice with regard to one another, which are engraven on our minds, although, from our ignorance of human characters, they are often misapplied, are original memorials within us, of the laws by which our personal conduct shall be judged at the tribunal of God.

There is another fact in the history of human life, which we ought to consider as confirming them. Our talents grow in our possession, in some proportion to the ardour with which we employ them : And, on the other hand, we lose the advantages which we had received, when we have either neglected to cultivate them at the proper season, or have not applied them to their legitimate ends, or have perverted them to purposes contrary to the design for which they were bestowed on us. We reap the ef-

fects of our activity, with more certainty, than even the result of our original endowments; and suffer more from the perversion of talents, than even from the want of them.

Facts of this kind, of which every man feels the impression, because they are inseparable from our conditions as intelligent creatures, serve as a perpetual pledge and memorial, of the relation which the last sentence to be pronounced on our conduct shall bear, not only to the precise advantages which have been given or denied us, but to our personal improvement or perversion of them.

I do not mention them as arguments or speculations: I mention them as facts, which illustrate the moral government of God; which have an intimate relation to its final result; and which (as I am now to shew) accord exactly with the precise and definite explanations given us by the gospel.

In our Lord's parable of the talents, related in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew*, he represents those who have equally cultivated

* Matthew xxv. 14—30.

very unequal talents, as receiving each a reward in proportion to the talents which were given him : He who had received ten talents, is described as accounting for ten ; he who had five, as accounting for five ; and both are represented as attaining the result of their fidelity, in proportion to the account which was required of them. On the other hand, he who had received but one talent, is made to account as strictly for that one, as he could have been required to account if he had received ten ; and he suffers the punishment incurred by the perversion of one, with as much severity as could have been applied to him, if he had possessed and perverted all the talents which had been given to his fellow-servants. He is condemned, not because he did not gain five or ten talents, but because, having but one talent to employ, he did not gain, or endeavour to gain, one talent more ; because the single advantage which was given him was neglected, or was " hidden in the earth," in contempt of his Lord's authority.

No illustration can be more pointed or exact, than this is, of the strict and definite account which shall be demanded of us at the tribunal

of God, of the precise situations in which we have acted, and of our personal application of the peculiar talents which have been entrusted to us.

Our Lord has given us another example to illustrate the same doctrine, from the rules by which we form our estimate of one another. He mentions the fact, that "to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more;" and uses it to illustrate the conduct of God to "the servant who knew his will," and to him who did not know it. "That servant," he says*, "which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

He is not guiltless who sins in ignorance, if the means of better information are within his

* Luke xii. 47. 48.

reach ; and he suffers in proportion to the guilt of a criminal ignorance or negligence. But, in comparison with him who has sinned against his conscience, or conviction, “he shall be beaten,” according to this parable, “with few stripes:” A circumstance, to which our Lord referred when he prayed on the cross for his merciless tormentors ; “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do *:” A circumstance, which the apostle Peter had in his eye, when, in addressing the Jews who crucified our Lord, he said, “And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers †:” A circumstance, which the apostle Paul, who had no design to exculpate himself, or to lessen the guilt of the first part of his life, mentions and applies to his own conversion ; “I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief ‡.”

He is not free from blame who ought to have been better informed. But his transgression is far more aggravated, who knew precisely the

* Luke xxiii. 34.

† Acts iii. 17.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 13.

will of God, and deliberately set himself against it; and the sentence to be pronounced on his conduct, shall be in proportion, not only to the sins which he has committed, but to the knowledge which he has abused, and the sense of duty by which he ought to have been determined.

There is one other statement of the same doctrine, given us by the apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans: "There is no respect of persons with God: For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law †."

Here the doctrine is applied to the situations of those who have received the least, and of those who have enjoyed the best external and religious advantages. Every man's conduct is estimated by the opportunities which he has really possessed, and by the precise circumstances in which he has sinned against God, or has obeyed his will. No man is condemned, because he did not possess the means of duty, or is tried by

† Rom. ii. 11. 12.

advantages which were given to his neighbour, and were with-held from him ; but every individual is condemned, or acquitted, according to the specific advantages which were allotted to himself. Superior opportunities are represented as the aggravations of his guilt, who has not used, or who has perverted them ; while the most limited talents, the most imperfect information, and the most defective external advantages, are affirmed to be the measure of his account, who has received no more, or who has had no more placed within his reach.

This, then, is the general language both of reason and of Scripture, concerning the relation, which the last sentence of God on the conduct of men shall bear to the advantages, which have been given or have been denied them in this life. When this part of the subject is connected with the implicit acquiescence in the duties assigned us in our several conditions, which the sense of the authority of God, under which we are all equally placed, ought effectually to teach us ; and with our indispensable obligation to cultivate, and our danger from the perversion of the blessings we have received, whether they

are many or few ; we must be conscious, that the general doctrine, illustrated under these heads, is of the most solemn and impressive kind. I beseech your attention, therefore, to the three following views of its practical application.

1. The doctrine, which I have attempted to illustrate, ought to teach those in the lowest departments of human life, how strict even their account shall be at the tribunal of God.

I say to every one of them, it is in vain to murmur against God, because he has given more to others than he has bestowed on thee. This was what the unprofitable servant did, when he addressed this presumptuous language to his Lord ; “ I knew that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown *.” He thought with sullenness, or he thought with malignity, of the distinction which had been made betwixt him and his fellow-servants, in the distribution of the talents entrusted to them ; and, disdainig the authority under which he was placed, “ he hid his talent in the earth,” till

* Matthew xxv. 24.

he was overwhelmed by the retribution which he had deliberately provoked.

That which God has allotted to thee, is thy portion, both of duty and of talents, and must be the measure of thy last account. Nothing shall be required which was not given, or which might not have been attained. If thou hast only to labour in the house, or in the field, it is there that thy fidelity is to be proved and tried. If thou art required to suffer much, or even to suffer through life, it is thy peculiar duty "to reverence the rod, and him who hath appointed it;" and to believe, that it is by patience and by suffering, that thy personal account to God must be prepared. To thee it is nothing that thy neighbour has received more, or that he enjoys a better portion, than has been given to thee. "To his own master he standeth or falleth*." But it is of the utmost importance to consider, that "every man shall bear his own burden;" and that thou shalt be required to account as strictly for the duties of the place which has been assigned thee, as the most prosperous man can

* Rom. xiv. 4.

be called to answer for the greatest advantages, or for the most superior endowments.

If, with the limited advantages of the poor, thou hast neither acquired contentment, nor industry, nor gratitude, nor integrity, nor resignation, nor trust in God ; the contrary vices, “ except thou shalt repent,” must, of necessity, seal thy condemnation “ at the judgment of the great day.” It shall avail thee nothing that thou hast received little, if thou hast perverted whatsoever was given thee, to violate thy known duties, or to set at defiance the authority of God, and the law of Christ. Poverty and profligate manners united, are sources of consummate wretchedness in this world ; and human language can give us but a faint idea of their final result in the world to come.

But, on the other hand, it ought to invigorate the hearts of the helpless and of the poor, who “ forsake not their own mercies,” to know, that the integrity, and the personal virtues, of those who are placed in the lowest departments, attain their end in the kingdom of God, with as much certainty, as the fidelity which has

been proved by the most splendid service. He who is "faithful in little," is approved in heaven, as well as "he who is faithful in much." God judges by the same rule the great and the small. He knows every individual man, and follows him with his eye. He thinks with kindness and forbearance of the meanest of his servants: And he writes with the same affection, "in the book of life," the fidelity of him who has the lowest place, and of him who has the most conspicuous talents.

2. The doctrine, which I have attempted to illustrate, ought to come home, with a peculiar force, to those on whom Providence has bestowed superior advantages among their brethren.

What an account hast thou to render, who, in point of understanding, or of wealth, or of active talents, or of prosperity through life, or of many of these separate advantages united, hast been far distinguished above thy fellow-servants!

If thou hast hardened thine heart against the authority of God; and, instead of having applied thy mind to godliness, or to good works, hast deliberately employed thy superior advantages

against thy duties, to render thy vices more conspicuous, than they would have been, if thou hadst held one of the most limited conditions of human life; think not that this aggravated perversion has escaped the eye of the Judge of all, or that thou shalt not be strictly required to answer for it at his tribunal. He shall demand an account of every talent, of every opportunity, and of every good impression which he has given thee: and except thou shalt repent in earnest, and shalt hear the voice of the Son of God in mercy, before "the day of wrath" shall come, the meanest of the poor shall be received with kindness, when thy doom shall be fixed with the worst of the wicked.

There is one source of perversion, to which those who possess superior talents, or enjoy unusual prosperity, are peculiarly liable. Conscious of the distinction they have attained, they are perpetually in danger of indulging an inordinate self-esteem, or of expressing, in their intercourse with other men, such sentiments of vain-glory and pride, as are altogether unsuitable to the character of dependent beings. It is the chief design of the text before us, to guard

us against this common, but fatal abuse of the gifts of God. "Who hath made thee to differ from another?" says the apostle, "and what hast thou which thou hast not received? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it*?" It is the good pleasure of God, or his good providence alone, which confers blessings on one man which are not allotted to another: and he who glories among his brethren when his cup is full, does not merely sin against his neighbour who is wounded by his pride; but "he lifts up his horn on high" against the almighty and universal Lord of all. "Pride was not made for man, nor high looks for him who is born of a woman:" And "he who hath made one individual to differ from another," "knoweth the proud afar off."

Every man of understanding must be conscious of the advantage of superior talents, both for the ends and the duties of the present life: But it is impossible not to feel, that it is equally preposterous and unworthy, to render them subservient to the pride and to the passions of the mo-

ment ; entirely and absolutely dependent as we are, for every thing in our possession, and fast preparing to drop together into the grave, where every external distinction is lost for ever. “ The small and great are there ; and the servant is free from his master *.”

On the other hand, the doctrine which the text ought to bring home to us, is most interesting and consolatory to those, who have in any degree faithfully employed superior talents. Their sphere of duty is high ; but the result shall have an exact correspondence to it. They shall be judged among their brethren by their efficient means, and by their real duties : and though their imperfections will certainly be found in the account of their best services to God and men, whatsoever they have done in faith, or done in earnest, or done in love, or done to God, or done to helpless men, or done “ to a disciple in the name of a disciple,” or done in humility, with any measure of pure intentions, shall be accounted to them as gain in “ the day of the Lord,” “ I know thy works,” saith

* Job iii. 19.

the Son of God, “and thy labour, and thy patience”—and “that for my name’s sake thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted*.” “Who-soever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my father who is in heaven †.” I add,

3. That the doctrine which I have endeavoured to illustrate, ought to make a deep impression on those, who have received a large portion of religious advantages, by means of the “gospel of the grace of God.”

Ages and generations of men have lived and died without the knowledge of the gospel: and yet every man shall be condemned at the tribunal of God, who has perverted the talents which he did possess; and who, in the application of his personal advantages, whatsoever they have been, has deliberately sinned against his conscience in the sight of God. “Of how much sorer punishment shall they be accounted worthy,” who pervert or neglect the great salvation of the gospel; “who count the blood of the co-

* Rev. ii. 2. and 3.

† Matthew x. 32.

venant an unholy thing, or do despite unto the Spirit of Grace †?”

Men of every order, who have had the benefit of the gospel, shall account to God, not only for the superior advantages of the dispensation under which they have lived, and for the light and information which it has spread around them; but for every good impression which it has made on their minds; for every good intention, or strong conviction of duty, which it has at any time awakened within them; for every good motive, or desire, with which it has, in any instance, inspired them; for every duty which it has urged them to fulfil; for the effects of every temptation which it has warned them to shun; for every sin which it has brought home to their consciences; for all the repentance to which it has solicited or incited them; and for the reception which they have given to the mercy and salvation promulgated by him, “whom God set forth to be a propitiation thro’ faith in his blood,” that “whosoever believeth on him,” “might receive the remission of sins.”

This must, indeed, be a solemn account, sup-

† Heb. x. 29.

posing it to be minutely taken. The last sentence to be pronounced on our conduct will be an awful sentence, if the gospel shall be ultimately found “to have come to us in word only *,” and not “in demonstration of the spirit and of power †:” or, if it shall appear before the tribunal of God, that though we have professed to believe Christianity, we have not attained the ends of our faith.

Even under the gospel, our advantages are by no means equal. But every man shall answer in his own place for the effects of the gospel on his own mind, and for all the doctrine of salvation, as well as for every impression of duty, which it has ever brought home to his conviction.

Happy is he, who can say with a full persuasion, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ‡.” “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God ||.”

* 1 Thess. i. 5.

† 1 Cor. ii. 4.

‡ Philip. i. 21.

|| Gal. ii. 20.

SERMON II.

ON

THE MINUTE IMPROVEMENT OF THE
BLESSINGS OF PROVIDENCE.

ST JOHN VI. 12.

“Jesus said to his disciples, gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”

THE instruction we may receive from the spirit of this text, is not confined to the subject to which it was originally applied. I am to illustrate a variety of examples, to which the language of the text may be adapted, by which men, in the most different situations, may be able to estimate both their obligations and their fidelity.

The advantages which the providence of God bestows on us in this life, are all liable to be di-

minished by events, and to be gradually exhausted. But our obligation to employ them faithfully for the purposes for which we have received them, is unalterably the same, as long as any part of them remains in our possession. He who regulates our duties by our means of fulfilling them, with exact discrimination, requires us to account to him as strictly for the smallest portion of blessings, or of talents, which is permitted to remain with us, as for the advantages which we continue to possess in their full extent.

When our Lord had miraculously fed five thousand men, with five loaves and two fishes, he said to the twelve apostles, "Gather up the fragments which remain, that nothing be lost."

I select the following examples to illustrate the minute improvement of the blessings of providence which this fact may be employed to suggest to us: "The fragments" of the provision made for our temporal necessities—"The fragments" of our time—"The fragments" of our private comfort, or of our personal advantages—"The fragments" of our health, or of our vigour.

The obligation is indispensable, "that nothing shall be lost" in the management of any of these blessings, or in the use or application of the least portion of them which remains to us. None of the examples is foreign to the language of the text; and when they are taken together, they will lead us far into the business of human life, and into the duties by which good men ought to prove their faith, and to adorn it. I direct your attention,

I. To "the fragments" of the provision made for our temporal necessities; for this was the original subject to which the text was applied.

If ever there was a time, when the care of fragments might have been thought useless or unnecessary, we might have supposed that to have been the time, when our Lord had fed "five thousand men" with "five loaves and two fishes;" and by so doing, had shewn his disciples, how easy it was for him to provide for every possible situation in which they could be placed. Yet this was precisely the time which he selected to admonish them, that the superfluity was not beyond their care, and that "the fragments" were to be gathered with the same

attention, which would have been necessary if their subsistence had depended on them.

The situation in which it was delivered renders the admonition peculiarly pointed and impressive. It is an admonition to men of every rank, of the fidelity with which they are bound to employ the gifts of providence, and of the solicitude with which they are required to guard them from abuse and perversion.

It is an admonition to the rich ; not against the full enjoyment of the blessings which God has bestowed on them, and which he requires them to use with gratitude and humility ; but against the habit of squandering, without judgment and without thought, that which ought to have been reserved for private comfort, or for good works. It is an admonition against the ostentatious neglect of that which they do not use ; which not only is an insult offered to the poverty of other men, but indicates the utmost insensibility of mind to the bounty of God. It is an admonition against the improvident waste of the provisions, which are given for the sustenance and comfort of human life ; which prosperous men scarcely allow themselves to per-

ceive, amidst the superfluities which seem to preclude the necessity of frugality or care ; and by which even their servants and dependents are permitted to aggravate their perversion of the gifts of God.

The frugality, which is a matter of necessity to the poor, ought to be an object of impressive duty among the rich, as faithful stewards of the gifts of God, both for themselves and for their brethren. Their wealth is allotted them for the glory of God among men, that they may not only have the means of private comfort, but be able to send a supply to him who is in want, or consolation to him who is pressed down by calamities, or relief to him who has no friend : And the superfluities which they possess, are pledges from the God of providence, of the usefulness for which he shall require them to account, when “the small and the great” shall be judged together.

No degree of wealth can therefore justify the unprincipled waste or profusion of the rich, who squander that which they cannot use ; or the thoughtless negligence by which they permit their servants wantonly to scatter “the frag-

ments" of their abundance, which they ought to preserve and to employ, as the precious gifts of God "to him who needeth."

The sense of duty will instruct a good man, how he ought to guard from abuse the blessings which are entrusted to him by the bounty of heaven; and, when they are beyond his own wants, with how much conscientious and deliberate attention, he ought to treasure up the least portion "which remains" of them, for the consolation of helpless men, and for the glory of God by them.

The admonition of the text is addressed to those who *serve*, or who depend on the rich, as well as to the rich themselves; to remind them, that they are not permitted either to waste or to squander that which is not their own; that "the fragments" of every day's provisions are committed to their trust; and that they are under an indispensable obligation to manage them with so much attention before God and man, that nothing shall be either lost or destroyed, by their negligence, by their profusion, or by their dishonesty.

Every class of conscientious servants ought to

feel the impression of this admonition, wheresoever their master's goods are entrusted to them; in the house, and in the field; when their master's eye is on them, and when they have nothing but their consciences to guard their fidelity. A man's sense of duty, and the sincerity of his faith in the gospel, are as exactly ascertained by his reverence or by his neglect of a precept, such as the admonition of this text, as they can be by almost any other test which it is possible to apply to them. "He who is faithful in little, is faithful also in much." "Servants," says the apostle, "be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, in singleness of your hearts, as unto Christ, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men *."

The spirit of the text may be applied to the condition of *the poor*, as well as to the consciences of the rich; to teach the poor how to value, and how to husband, the gifts of God, when their wants are supplied; to teach them how to

* Ephes. vi. 5. 6. 7.

estimate "the fragments which remain," when they have more than their need requires; to teach them moderation, as well as frugality, in the enjoyment of whatsoever is given them; to teach them, that the blessing of heaven rests on "the fragments" of the poor—the blessing which comes from him who fed the multitude in the wilderness, and who so blessed the widow's "barrel of meal" in the day of famine, and her "cruse of oil *," that they did not waste till the day of abundance came.

He who has these impressions on his mind, "gathers the fragments" of his scanty provision as the precious pledges of the God of heaven, that he shall supply all his wants. While they last, he gives thanks to God that he is not forsaken; and when they are exhausted, he comforts himself by reflecting, that nothing was wasted, neglected, or lost, which the bounty of heaven bestowed on him; and that he can trust to the God of providence all that is to come.

The ingratitude, the waste, and the improvidence, of the poor, add more to their guilt, than even to their wretchedness, or to their poverty.

* 1 Kings xvii. 16.

But the poor, “who are rich in faith,” are the “heirs of promise.” While “they gather their fragments” as blessings from heaven, with faith and humility, the kindness of providence will not desert them, and “their eyes shall see the salvation of God.”

Let us take an example,

II. From “the fragments” of our time.

We are placed in this world in a state of probation for the world to come, which we are required to accomplish by means of the duties and situations assigned us ; and the result of which is to determine our condition for ever. The consequences must be permanent ; while the time allotted us for probation is not only limited, but, as far as our knowledge extends, perfectly uncertain.

Every man, who feels the impression of these facts on his mind, must be conscious, that it is of the last importance, that the time given him for probation should be employed to the best advantage ; and that, if possible, it should not only be fully occupied, but steadily and faithfully directed to the duties on which so much is hereafter to depend.

Though religion is the great animating principle of fidelity, the time of probation is not to be engrossed by the exercises of religion, or by acts of devotion. These are but means leading to the general ends in view. The portion of our time which they require is no doubt of great importance, to rivet on our minds the certainty of the world to come, and our personal interest in the doctrines of salvation by Christ ; to bring home to our consciences, by renewed and successive impressions, the considerations of duty which ought to determine our conduct ; to prepare us, by means of the habitual awe of God upon our minds, to meet the temptations of the world with firmness, to guard us against “the sins which most easily beset us ;” by the intimate knowledge of ourselves which the continued exercises of religion enable us to possess ; and to purify the motives of our conduct, by means of the faith which is strengthened and “sanctified by prayer.”

The devotion which cultivates or strengthens the influence of religion within the mind, has an extensive effect on the occupations to which our time ought to be chiefly directed ; and serves to

support both our ardour and our fidelity in applying to them : but it is equally plain, that the acts of religion must ever be subordinate to the habits which they are designed to promote or to preserve.

The chief portions of our time must, of necessity, be given to the active business, and to the essential duties, of human life ; to the usefulness for which either our talents or our situations have qualified us ; to the assistance which we can give to other men, by supplying their wants, or by relieving their infirmities, or by promoting their comfort or salvation ; and to the opportunities afforded us of glorifying God in this world, by means of the industry and labour which our personal duties, or our several relations require.

To these indispensable objects of human life, the chief part of our time ought certainly to be devoted, whilst we keep our eyes fixed on the result of our probation, and “ wait for the Son of God from heaven.”

But it is a solemn consideration indeed, that all that portion of our time, which is not direct-

ly or remotely subservient to such ends as these ; all that part of it, by which we do not sincerely endeavour to promote the glory of God, and our personal usefulness in the place assigned us, or which is not subservient to our progress in holiness, in fidelity to God, or in benevolence to men ; is truly perverted from the ends for which it was given us, and is to be set down in our deliberate reflections, as time irrecoverably lost.

There is a certain portion of our time, which we necessarily require for relaxation from the more serious or severe employments of life. But it is most humbling to the best of us, to consider dispassionately, how much time is lost in sloth, or spent in idleness ; how much we might have reserved for duties, which has left with us no memorial, but that it was spent in vain ; how much we have given to acknowledged folly, or to trifles, or to vain-glory or to pride ; or to envy, or to the useless pursuits or the unhallowed strifes of the world, which we ought to have given to the labour, or to the activity which our duties require, or to the good works which we know to be within our sphere.

It is impossible, without deep regret, to consider deliberately, how much we might have done more than we have ever been able to accomplish, if, without encroaching on the relaxations we required, we had faithfully employed the time we have lost, in our labours or in our active pursuits, in the culture or in the discipline of our own minds, in the occupations which might have profited other men, or in the application of our talents to our permanent interests. If we turn our thoughts to this subject with serious and undivided attention, we shall find good reason to ascribe a great part of our deficiencies in knowledge, in godliness, in good works, and in substantial virtues, to the carelessness or to the levity with which we have regarded "the fragments" of time, or to the listless negligence with which we have permitted them to be lost. We perceive not how precious our time has been, till we are deprived of the opportunities of employing it; nor, till it cannot be recalled, do we perceive that the time which we have deliberately squandered, leaves on the conscience the guilt of neglecting all that which ought to have been done, and the bitter reflec-

tion of having deservedly forfeited whatsoever might have been attained.

It is impossible to calculate how much might be done, by means of "the fragments" of time which might be fairly saved from the sleep which we do not require, from the sloth which we indulge against our judgment, or from the frivolous occupations which add nothing to our happiness, and which are constantly encroaching both on our usefulness and on our duties. The time which might be redeemed, from these sources, by almost any individual man, if it were faithfully and religiously employed for the business of human life, and for the great purposes to which our understandings and our talents ought to be applied, would add much more than it is possible to state, both to the result of his labours, and to their effects on the probation appointed him. To a great multitude, it would add at least an equal proportion to the time which they can deliberately set down as employed for useful purposes, or as having been spent in fulfilling their real duties. It would do much more to some individuals, whose time has never been

precious to them, and whose essential duties have never been the chief objects of their solicitude.

But, what it is most important to consider, the time which every one of us has it still in his power to redeem, if it were faithfully employed, would be sufficient to lengthen the duration of our active labours to more than twice their usual term. Could we resolve, in earnest, to employ to the best advantage the hours which have hitherto passed unheeded or unoccupied; and to watch, with sedulous anxiety, the moments which we are conscious might be rendered substantially useful in the business of human life; our activity would be extended far indeed beyond the ordinary limits, and its effects beyond our most sanguine computations.

The imperfection of human nature does not permit us to believe, that this habit of the mind is either easily or often attained. Unless it has become strong indeed, by long and steady cultivation, it is certain that our vigour, both of body and of mind, is exhausted much sooner than our time. There are, however, a sufficient number of examples to convince us, how much

might certainly be done by means of "the fragments" of time, if we were heartily disposed to employ them. When we examine how much beyond the ordinary rate of human attainments, those have done who seem to have best understood the value of their time, we are astonished at the extent, and at the result of their labours; we shrink within ourselves, as if we were conscious that, when compared with them, we have done scarcely any thing from our birth.

Even without such a comparison as this, which it will be always useful to consider, if the best of us shall deliberately examine their own lives, they will find so much of their time which has been lost, so much which has been squandered, so much which ought to have been better employed, and so much for which they cannot answer to God or to themselves, that an admonition to persuade them to redeem "the fragments" of time, which are still in their power, must come home to their consciences, as relating to the most impressive and most forcible obligations.

How much time yet remains to any of us, while we continue in this world, is known only

to God: But the imperfection of our personal attainments, and our probation, which is still incomplete, suggest a subject of the most awful consideration. The least portion of time becomes incalculably precious, from the uncertainty of human life. He who may die to-morrow, has not to-day an hour to neglect or to lose. He who feels how much of his time has already been squandered, and how much is yet to be done within the narrow limits of his uncertain life, in order to fulfil his essential duties, or "to work out his salvation," can scarcely fail to regard the time which remains to him, both as the resource and the consolation of his heart.

If this should also be lost, nothing which he has left undone can ever be repaired. On the other hand, if God shall enable him to employ the time to come better, more faithfully, more earnestly, and more steadily, than he has employed that which he can never recal; something, at least, he may still attain, which may be accounted to him as gain, "when the Lord shall come."

On this point I shall say nothing more, than that he who shall learn to estimate "the frag-

ments" of time at their proper value in early life, shall raise his head above his brethren from youth to age ; and that even those who know best the duties and the attainments of human beings, cannot adopt a rule which, under God, will render them more successful in both, or more respectable through life, than that which shall teach them to consider "the fragments" of time as the objects of their uniform and sedulous attention.

We cannot recover that which is spent ; but every portion of our time to come is yet our own. Whatever part of it we shall employ in essential duties, or in labours really useful to ourselves or to the world, will neither be spent in vain, nor ever be remembered with regret.

Let us now take an example,

III. From "the fragments" of our private comfort, or of our personal advantages.

The advantages by which we are required to fulfil our personal obligations in this world, are not only bestowed on us in very unequal proportions, but are destined to remain in our possession for very different periods. One man's prosperity is continued to the end of his life ;

or, at least, he experiences no events which make any striking or sensible encroachment either on the prosperity of his external condition, or on his private comfort. But another man's satisfactions are interrupted in the midst of his enjoyment of them. They may be withdrawn from him by means of events of which he was least aware, and for which he was not prepared. He may lose his prosperity early, by the death, by the calamities, or by the misconduct of those on whom he depended. Even the advantages of religion may be diminished by events, or we may be deprived of the benefit or of the comfort of them, by circumstances which change our external situations, or render us incapable of enjoying them.

It must be evident, that in accounting to God for our conduct, we have to answer for the full extent and duration of the advantages we have been permitted to possess ; and that he who has glorified God when his cup was full, by a faithful application and improvement of blessings which he has long enjoyed, shall shine at last among the purest of faithful men.

But it is of great importance to consider, that

our obligations are not destroyed, when our personal advantages are diminished or are withdrawn ; and that an account shall be as strictly required of the least portion of them which remains to us, as could have been demanded, if we had been permitted to continue to the end of our lives, in the full possession of them.

Men are extremely apt to think themselves absolved from obligations, which they have not the same means of fulfilling which they once possessed ; and even to imagine, that they are entitled to indulge a chagrin, which equally destroys their happiness, and disqualifies them for their active duties, from the regret with which they look back on satisfactions or advantages of which the providence of God has deprived them. "My personal comfort in this world is at an end," will the desponding spirit sometimes say ; "for that on which it chiefly depended is taken away for ever. My duties are no more the same ; for, besides the change of circumstances which has turned them into a new channel, that which chiefly supported me in applying to them exists no longer. I have lost the spring from which I derived my ardour, in the domestic or

in the personal comforts, of which the irresistible decrees of providence have deprived me. If I have consolations, they are not for this world; and I have no longer any thing to induce me to mix with active men."

Language such as this is more frequently the effect of the disappointment or disgust which the spirit of the world produces, than of the faith or resignation which we ought to learn from religion. Heavy afflictions, which deprive us of the objects of our confidence or affection, which come upon us suddenly, or which essentially derange our private habits, are certainly hard to bear. It requires both length of time and a strong faith in God, to teach us the submission which it is our duty to acquire.

But there are few events indeed, which can deprive men of all their comfort, or which can remove them from the sphere, or from the obligation of their personal duties. There are fewer still, which can entitle them to make death their object, or to set bounds to the probation assigned them. If they once enjoyed a large proportion of personal or of domestic satisfactions, is it gratitude to God to desert his service, or to sink

into despondency, because his sovereign will has taken away that which they were long permitted to possess? Was their fidelity at all proportioned to the advantages which they enjoyed, while they were yet in their possession? Or do they not feel how little they have done in comparison with what was certainly in their power? And must they not then be conscious of the activity with which they are bound to “fill up that which has been wanting” in their service, in proportion to the means which are still in their hands? If they consider how much they ought to have attained, while they had every advantage to assist and to animate them; shall it be a subject of chagrin or of despair, that God has changed their lot, or diminished their personal comforts, or varied or narrowed their sphere of duty? Or shall they feel themselves at liberty to disregard the admonition of providence, “to gather up the fragments which remain?”

There is scarcely any situation in human life, in which there are not many comforts remaining, whatever the blessings are, which have been taken away. This is an unquestionable

fact, though we were not to consider the cases, in which providence compensates by subsequent events, the heaviest calamities which we can experience. We may have lost what we valued as our best advantages, and may regret them with a degree of tenderness which supposes that their place cannot soon be supplied. We may have nothing more than "the fragments" of our most precious blessings, which were once entire. But it is possible, that, by the grace of God, the faith which is purified by sorrow, may enable us to make more of "the fragments" than we were able to attain by the full extent of our advantages. We are not to sink into despondency, whilst we are still permitted to enjoy many blessings, for which we give thanks to God : Whilst in the use of them there is still a duty which we feel to be binding on us, a good work which we have still the opportunity of fulfilling, a service which we can still perform to those around us, or a good example, which the blessings which we still possess can enable us to shew them ; or if, whilst "we suffer affliction by the will of God," there is still a friend who helps our infirmities, whose face we

can cheer by our gratitude, or by our sympathy, or by our patience, or by our trust in God.

If we are still capable of activity and of active duties, no deprivation of past satisfactions will justify our inactivity. Much less can it entitle us to indulge the despondency, which looks only to the grave. On the other hand, if we shall estimate at their true value "the fragments which remain" to us of private or personal comfort, and shall use them faithfully, as the means of fulfilling the duties which we are not permitted to relinquish, they will grow or will be multiplied in our possession by the influence of God. If we shall persevere till we reap the result of them, one satisfaction will be added to another, and God may be pleased "to bless our latter end," like Job's, even more than the happiest part of our past time.

No man can have a right to reject the advantages which are left with him, or to relinquish the duties which he can still fulfil, on account of the blessings which have been taken away. We may have good reason to regret that which we no longer possess. But as long as our probation lasts, much will remain after all that we

can lose, which we are bound both to value, and to employ for discharging our indispensable duties.

If the providence of God were to deprive us even of the advantages which we receive by the institutions of religion; or if they were to be sensibly diminished or impaired by circumstances over which we could have no influence or controul; it would still be our duty to employ, with the earnestness which our best interests demand, the knowledge which we had already acquired, the help of faithful men around us, the word of God (if we were still permitted to read it for ourselves), and “the prayer of faith” at “the throne of grace.”

Those who could, in such a case, neglect what they still possessed, on account of that which the providence of God had put beyond their reach, would incur a heavy condemnation indeed; whilst those who “gathered up the fragments which remained” to them, “would flourish” still, like “plants in the house of God;” “the Spirit of Christ helping their infirmities,” and “supplying all their need.”

In whatever department we are destined to act, we must be conscious, that our duties are in exact proportion to our talents. Our obligations cannot be diminished, while our personal comforts and capacities are still entire. And even when our advantages are impaired by events, we are still indispensibly bound to cultivate the full extent of the advantages which remain to us; that nothing may be lost which they ought to be the means of attaining; and that our fidelity may be equally complete, whether our talents are many or few.

As the last example which I shall mention, I direct your attention,

IV. To “the fragments” of our health or of our vigour.

Every man of understanding acknowledges our obligation to apply our talents to the business of human life, or to the ends of our probation for the world to come, as long as we are capable of exercising them. It is impossible seriously to doubt that our personal duties must be indispensable, as long as we have the means of fulfilling them.

But when the doctrine is applied to practice,

we are apt to take very different views of the subject. Though it is a truth fully established by experience, that it is best for every man, in the present life, and most for his advantage as an immortal being, to persevere in the active duties of his condition, as long as it is possible for him to discharge them; there is nothing which men more generally allow to dwell on their thoughts through life, than the idea, that a time shall come, long before they die, when they shall be able to relinquish their usual or professional occupations, and to spend the rest of their time, without labour or exertion, in the enjoyment of their private or domestic situations. Few in comparison are ever permitted to realise an idea, which so many allow to occupy their imaginations. Of those who are enabled to relinquish their labours, if their lives are prolonged, the greater part have reason to repent what they have done. By the change produced on their habits, and by want of use, their faculties are gradually impaired, as the sources of their activity are diminished; and they meet with chagrin and disappointment,

where they expected to have found nothing but satisfaction or tranquillity.

I do not say that those who have retired from the bustle of affairs cannot employ, and employ faithfully, "the fragments" both of their health and of their vigour. They have certainly much in their power, if they consecrate their leisure to real duties, and keep their talents occupied as they ought to be; much which relates to the discipline of their own minds; much which can be done in domestic life, for the advantage of the old or of the young, to whom they can give their attention or their time; much by which they can be useful to those whose characters they can influence, whose hands they can strengthen; whom they can assist in their difficulties, or comfort in their sickness, or furnish with the means either of prosperity or of religion.

Those who apply the decline of life to such purposes as these, do not retire in vain from the bustle of the world. If they embrace heartily the opportunities of usefulness which they still possess, nothing is lost which they are capable of attaining. That which they do in secret for

the glory of God, or for the advantage of their fellow mortals, is sanctified by the prayer of faith, and shall be accounted to them as good service, in "the day of Christ."

But though I say this, I have no hesitation to add, that those who abide by their active occupations from a sense of duty, and who employ the last portion of their talents where they spent their vigour, have much better reason to expect, that both their usefulness and their personal comfort shall be continued as long as they live.

No good man's conscience will suggest to him that he ought to become weary of his labours. He who delights in the service on which his duty or his usefulness depends, can have no wish to relinquish it. He is anxious to persevere in the duties which he can in any degree accomplish, even when he is conscious of his decline. He looks up to God, to whom he thinks he shall soon return; and though he knows that his summons to die cannot be distant, it continues to be the first wish of his heart, that he may be found employing the last portions of his health and life, in the duties of his proper place.

A man who is able to preserve this happy temper of mind to the end, has a far better prospect, than other habits could afford him, of possessing the vigour of his faculties to his last hour; and therefore of extending his labours and his usefulness far beyond the ordinary term of human activity. He hears the voice of his master, urging his duties and his fidelity on his conscience, till his strength is gone: And he does not lose the impression of it, till the last spark of life expires.

There are not, perhaps, many living examples to which all this description can be literally applied; but some individuals there certainly are, within our own knowledge, to whom it may be applied without any exaggeration. He who lives, or who endeavours to live, in those habits of personal activity and exertion, in the decline of life, and who dies at last in faith and patience, may well adopt the language of the apostle of the Gentiles, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the

righteous judge, will give to me ; and not to me only, but to all them who love his appearing.”

What a reproach is the idea of such a life, to the indolent, the careless, the useless characters which we find around us ! What a reproach even to “ men professing godliness,” who allow themselves deliberately to prefer their pleasures or their ease, to the fidelity which depends on active labours, or to the usefulness which they have the means of supporting to the end of their lives.

What an admonition do the considerations which I have represented suggest to every one of us ! They relate to some of the most important obligations which can be brought home to the consciences of men. The period allotted us for active duties is as uncertain as it is short. Much is yet to be done to render our fidelity complete, whether our talents have been cultivated or neglected, and how much soever they have been diminished by time. We cannot know how much remains to us of our time, or of our comfort, or of our talents, or of our health. We depend entirely and absolutely on the will of God. But we know who hath said, “ Your heavenly

father will give the holy Spirit to them who ask him *." "Our labour in the Lord," be it greater or less, "shall not be in vain." "In due time we shall reap, if we faint not:" And we are certain, that "he who endureth to the end shall be saved."

* Luke, xi. 13.

SERMON III.

ON

SELF-DENIAL.

LUKE ix. 23.

“Jesus said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself.”

THIS text represents the habits of self-denial as forming one of the leading features in the personal characters of the disciples of Christ. It describes “the discipline” which we ought to apply to our own minds; and which, in the present corrupt state of human nature, is inseparable from our progress in any department of our private duties. Our Lord says explicitly to us all, and he says it without qualifications or restric-

tions; "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself."

We are not to suppose, from the language of the text, that practical religion subjects us to a degree of self-denial, which no other interest or pursuit requires. Christianity is far from enjoining us to renounce those enjoyments of 'his life, which are not inconsistent with our duties, or which do not prevent us from fulfilling them; nor did our Lord intend, by the admonition of the text, to recommend the practice of personal austerities, which have no connection with real obligations, or no direct tendency to preserve their influence on our minds: Those who hold this language have departed widely from the spirit of our Lord's instructions, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." The austerity by which men deny themselves the comforts of life, or endanger their health, or torment their bodies, in the name of religion, is one of the most hurtful perversions of religious principle, which has ever been imposed on the credulity of the world. It can produce no advantage to individuals, and is pernicious, in the highest degree, to the moral principles, and to

the general interests, of mankind. The good sense which runs through every precept of the gospel, excludes the supposition, that any thing is to be done as duty to God, which has no precise or specific end, which is not of real importance by itself, or which does not belong to the efficient means by which our obligations are to be fulfilled.

Though Christianity is excellently adapted to the conditions of mankind, it is not without self-denial that men bring themselves either to rely on its doctrines, or to submit to its authority. It is a subject as much of experience as of theory, that there is in human nature an original aversion * to religion, to religious duties, to religious restraints, to the salvation which depends on religion, to the idea of salvation "by the cross of Christ." He who is conscious of his depravity, thinks not so much with fear as with indignation of "the righteous judgment of God:" And though, while he remains in this state of mind, his better reflections ought to give him many alarms with regard to his future con-

* Rom. v. 10.

dition, and will, besides, sometimes represent Christianity in a more favourable light; the pride of his heart steadily resists the authority which is opposed to his predominant inclinations, as well as the means of salvation, to which he finds it impossible to reconcile them*.

It will not therefore surprise us, that a cordial and settled acquiescence in the authority of religion should be represented as requiring a self-denial, which reaches a man's general habits of thinking as well as his course of life; or that the gospel should frequently and solemnly affirm, that "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature;" that, with regard to the general temper of his mind, "old things are passed away," and "all things are become new †;" that he is "the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good works ‡"; and that "he hath passed from death unto life ||." We shall be prepared to enter into the full meaning and spirit of the language which the New Testament

* Rom. viii. 7.

† Ephes. ii. 10.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 17.

|| 1 John iii. 14.

employs on this subject, when we shall have learnt from experience to consider practical Christianity, from its commencement in the mind of man, to its consummation in the kingdom of heaven, as a system of salutary discipline, adapted by the wisdom of God to the circumstances of human life, and to the condition of human nature.

But I am at present to confine myself to the more minute illustrations of the doctrine of the text, and to consider self-denial in common situations, as it ought to appear, in the personal conduct of those, who profess to embrace Christianity, and to abide by the rules which they find in the gospel.

It is impossible not to admit, that in order "to deny ourselves," according to the spirit of our Lord's injunction, we must be bound to subdue our inclinations, in every instance in which they would lead us into any thing which Christianity condemns, or which is unfavourable to our fidelity in Christian duties; and to submit, besides, to every degree of activity and patience, which the particular duties, or the general ends, of Christianity require.

It is this simple view of the subject which I propose to illustrate.

I select a few examples, which every man may bring home to the state of his own mind ; and I direct your attention,

I. To the self-denial requisite in fulfilling the duties, to which we feel that we are least inclined.

It is no uncommon attempt, even among those who consider themselves as sound believers, to adopt Christianity in parts, selecting for practice the duties which are most agreeable to them, and disregarding those which are resisted by the strong propensities of the heart.

There are duties which every man can fulfil, without doing any considerable violence to his natural temper. He whose heart is naturally generous and kind, does not hesitate "to do good, and to communicate;" to be useful to his friends, or beneficent to the poor ; to assist the helpless, or to have compassion on the dying : And because the good works, which his dispositions lead him to perform, are specially enjoined by our Lord, he is too apt to estimate his character by his ardour in applying to them.

They would certainly be a legitimate proof of his sincerity in the faith of the gospel, if his predominant motives were pure, and if he were equally faithful in the other departments of his personal duty. But among men living in the world, it is no uncommon error, to mistake their natural temper for their sense of duty, and to suppose, besides, that the acts of beneficence will compensate their want of fidelity in other things. It happens not less frequently, that they trample on justice, or temperance, or the fear of God, and believe, notwithstanding, that all is well, or that they are not deficient in their essential duties, because they abound in the works of mercy.

Those are not nearer the truth, in judging of themselves, who profess to be industrious, and just, and faithful in the business of this world ; but who place every virtue in the industry, the justice, or the fidelity which the world requires ; and allow themselves to live in the habitual and deliberate neglect of the discipline of their own minds, of the acts of devotion, and of “ faith which worketh by love.”

There is another order of men, whose views

of religion in practice are limited to their strict observation of religious rites, to the attention which they bestow on the doctrines of religion, to the ardour with which they contend for the purity of the faith, and to the external decency of manners which they preserve ; and who do not lose their own esteem as religious men, though they deliberately neglect “the weighty matters of the law,” justice, mercy, and truth.

These different characters represent to us the self-deceit, by which men persuade themselves, that they may be faithful to the profession of Christianity, without submitting to the self-denial which Christ enjoins. They would compensate, by their earnestness in some departments of duty, their want of fidelity in others ; and it is impossible not to perceive, that the duties which they neglect are precisely those, to which they are under the strongest obligations to apply. They are those which are chiefly resisted by their predominant propensities ; and are, for this reason, the chief duties by which they can prove their personal fidelity, or effectually “work out their own salvation.” “Strait is the gate,” said our Lord, “and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto

life, and few there be that find it*.” “Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able †.”

It is obvious, that there cannot be much personal virtue, and that there is no self-denial, in good works, which neither contradict our peculiar tempers, nor make any sensible encroachment on our interests in the present life. It is self-denial, in the sense of the text, to apply steadily and earnestly to duties to which we have strong inclinations opposed, because we are conscious of their indispensable obligation. It is self-denial to persevere in them, when we have both a severe and a continued struggle to maintain with ourselves; because we believe, “that unto every one that hath shall be given ‡,” and that habit and practice, “sanctified by the Holy Ghost ||,” and “by prayer §,” will at last reconcile our minds to them. It is the self-denial enjoined by our Lord, to make our consciences the measure and the rule of our con-

* Matthew vii. 14.

† Luke xiii. 24.

‡ Matthew xxv. 29.

|| Rom. xv. 16.

§ 1 Tim. iv. 5.

duct ; and to sacrifice our private inclinations, in every instance, to our sense of duty, or to our deliberate conviction of what we are bound to do or to shun.

The most faithful men will sometimes be sensible, that there are certain duties which they are apt to contemplate with reluctance, or which they cannot fulfil without sacrificing either their wishes, or their apparent interests in this world. The self-denial of the gospel supposes them to be even more ardent or solicitous to discharge with fidelity these difficult duties, than those which are easier in practice, or which are less contrary to their natural inclinations. Christianity requires them “to esteem all God’s commandments, concerning all things, to be right ;” but it specially enjoins them to be prepared to make every personal sacrifice, which can be requisite, in any circumstances, to render their fidelity complete, or to give them the testimony of their own minds, that “they have pleased God.” “He that loveth father or mother more than me,” said our Lord, “is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me ; and he that ta-

keth not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*." This doctrine, laid down by our Lord, received a most striking illustration from the conduct of the apostle Paul, in a situation in which every private affection gave way to an intrepid adherence to his personal duty. It cannot be represented in more impressive words than those in which he addressed the elders of the church of Ephesus: "And now behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things which shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God †."

The self-denial which our Lord enjoins, consists in the firm and habitual resolution of the mind, by which his disciples are determined to

* Matthew x. 37. 38. 39.

† Acts xx. 22. 23. 24.

subdue every private inclination inconsistent with their fidelity to him, and to apply steadily to every department of their personal duties, according to their best conviction of their obligation. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much *." A good man feels, besides, that he must be perpetually on his guard against every species of self-deceit, which would tempt him to prefer the easy to the difficult service; which would lead him to mistake the conduct to which his inclinations prompt him, for that which he ought to do; or which would conceal from his view his neglect of known and essential duties.

Following this doctrine a step farther, I direct you,

II. To the self-denial necessary in renouncing "the sins which most easily beset us †."

Religion certainly requires, that we shall deny ourselves to every thing, which we have any reason to suppose will operate on our minds as a temptation to sin. It commands us to reject the pleasures and advantages of this life in eve-

* Luke, xvi. 10. † Heb. xii. 1.

ry instance, in which they would influence or entice us to violate our indispensable duties.

But the self-denial, which is of most importance to every individual man, is evidently that by which he ought to resist his strongest temptations; those temptations which are in a peculiar manner adapted to the inclinations of his heart, or to his ruling passions; from which he has most danger to apprehend, and which it requires the greatest vigilance to avoid, or the greatest strength of resolution to overcome.

This is a branch of self-denial to which men will ever be most unwilling to direct their efforts. Self-deceit is never more agreeable to us, and is never more successful in perverting our conduct, than when it either represents the sins to which we are most inclined in a favourable light, as offences which may be soon compensated, or leads us to consider the struggle against them as an unnecessary severity which religion does not strictly enjoin, or as a useless encroachment on satisfactions, which we are unwilling to relinquish. Men persist in sins which gratify their private inclinations, and persuade themselves, that their fidelity, or their

self-denial in other points, will outweigh this circumstance when their characters shall be tried.

On the other hand, they are not entirely ignorant of the deception which they practise on their own minds ; and are far from being able to reconcile their consciences to their conduct. They have a consciousness of their guilt, even at the moment when they are labouring to palliate, or to disguise it ; and it frequently happens that, in opposition to their practice, they are compelled to form strong and repeated resolutions to renounce the pursuits, from which they find it impossible to separate the impressions of guilt. But neither their convictions nor their best resolutions avail them, when their peculiar temptations return. The present temptations are always as fascinating and as irresistible as those which preceded them. The struggle with themselves becomes gradually less. As they advance in life, their habits are confirmed ; and till they are so, the sins, into which they are successively betrayed, meet every day with less resistance from the temper of their minds.

It would be easy to specify minute examples

in the conduct of individual men ; from the sensual vices of excess, or of intemperance, from the effects of violent or of strong passions, from the arts of deceit or of malignity, from the pursuits of avarice or of ambition. It is difficult to persuade men to practise an efficient self-denial in any one of these instances, against the sins which they permit to be gradually interwoven with their pursuits in the world, or with the character of their minds. It is more difficult still to convince them, that without this self-denial, or without an earnest and habitual solicitude to subdue every inclination to the sins to which they have peculiar temptations, they cannot be the disciples of Christ.

But, it is not necessary to mention examples : for every man, who attends to the state of his own mind, knows minutely the sins, with regard to which he feels himself least disposed to practise self-denial ; the sins into which he is most frequently betrayed contrary to his deliberate convictions of duty, and in opposition to his best resolutions. He knows, with how much industry he labours to reconcile his conscience to his peculiar vices ; and how often

he endeavours to persuade himself, that if he shall only practise self-denial in other points, his want of it in these instances will not be ultimately charged to his account.

I beseech those, who are conscious that this is truly their state of mind, to consider deliberately what our Lord has said to them all: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." Did he mean that we are only to practise self-denial in the cases in which we have no strong inclinations to subdue? Or did he intend to say, that self-denial, in other instances, would be a sufficient test of our fidelity to him, although we should allow ourselves the indulgence of "the sins which most easily beset us?" Let us read what he has expressly said, to ascertain his meaning precisely. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee, that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee, that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole

body should be cast into Hell *.” The self-denial which our Lord urges on our consciences, is self-denial in the situations in which it is most difficult to practise it ; because these are the situations in which it is of most importance to the purity and to the fidelity of his disciples. It is self-denial with regard to the sins which either are already, or which are in danger of becoming our predominant habits ; a discipline adapted to the condition of human nature, to which every man is required to subject himself, who “ would save his soul from death,” or from the “ multitude of sins.”

This part of the doctrine chiefly relates to those who do not habitually feel “ the powers of the world to come,” or who do not heartily acquiesce in the authority of religion. But it brings home a strong admonition to better men, who are sensible of the infirmities, which adhere to them during all the course of their probation, “ lest any of them be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin †.” It requires a perpetual discipline, or self-denial, to the end of our lives, to be able to resist effectually “ the sins

* Matth. v. 29. 30.

† Heb. iii. 13.

which most easily beset us." If we have grace to persevere in it, "we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord *." We are certain of strength above our own to meet both our temptations and our infirmities, so as to assure us of ultimate success. We shall never regret either the struggles or the sacrifices to which our fidelity subjects us; and the victory over ourselves, be it in articles greater or less, will be a source of permanent satisfaction, beyond all that we can receive from the pleasures of this world.

On the other hand, we are certain that, "if any man will not deny himself," in such situations as those which I have represented, no degree of austerity in other points can at all avail him. His deficiency in the self-command which Christianity enjoins, will be as ruinous to his happiness in the present life, as it is fatal to his interests in the world to come.

It was necessary, on this subject, to direct your first attention to essential duties, and to positive sins. But there are other articles to which the self-denial of the text extends, and in which

* 1 Cor. xv. 58.

we must learn to practise it, if we are in earnest to preserve the purity, or the spirit of vital religion. And, therefore, I request your attention,

III. To the self-denial requisite with regard to every thing which is, either in itself, or by its consequences, unfavourable to our progress in practical religion.

Though we should not be perverted from our essential duties, there are perpetual obstructions to our progress in religion, arising from the present condition of human life. It is impossible not to perceive, that to guard ourselves effectually from the pollutions of the world, and to preserve to religion such a power over our affections, as is essential to its influence on our conduct, we are under an indispensable obligation to relinquish and to avoid many things, which are by themselves no direct violations of our positive obligations; but which we know from experience to have a tendency to betray us into sins, or to render us unfit for discharging our personal duties, or to deprive us of the means by which our duties ought to be fulfilled.

I shall mention a few examples to illustrate

this assertion ; though every individual man is best qualified to suggest the illustrations of it which are of most importance to himself, from his intimate knowledge of his own life.

I begin with an example, of which those only will feel the force, who believe that religion ought to predominate in all our conduct, and that its influence may be often injured, when there is no settled design to disavow its obligations.

Men of strong animal spirits, who have that kind of intercourse with the world which is suited to their peculiar temper, must be conscious of the errors into which their love of gaiety often betrays them, of the dangerous situations to which it introduces them, of the temptations for which it prepares them, and of its perpetual tendency to dissipate and interrupt the serious or deliberate reflections, which are essential to the steadfastness, and to the uniform tenor of all good conduct.

If they have ever experienced any considerable impressions of religion, they are too often led on from one indulgence to another, unfriendly to their progress in practical duties, till the influence of religion on their minds becomes at last

so weak, as to be incapable of resisting any strong temptation. Their original temper, and the society in which they live, betray them into so many things in succession which Christianity condemns, that they find it necessary at last to relieve themselves from their own reproach, by endeavouring to reconcile their consciences to their conduct. They overcome one religious restraint after another ; and though they are far from being satisfied with themselves, their animal spirits support them, even after they have lost their internal tranquillity.

It is certain that religion does not require us to relinquish the gaiety of temper, in which one man so often surpasses another, and which so well enables those who possess it in a superior degree, both to enjoy and to embellish the conditions of this life. On the contrary, the religion which is pure affords us better reasons to be chearful, than can be derived from any other source, and to enjoy the society of chearful men.

But, on the other hand, religion prescribes to us that kind of self-denial which sets a watch around the heart and mind against the tempta-

tions, of which this general temper so often becomes the instrument. We are under an indispensable obligation to restrain ourselves, when we are sensible that our love of gaiety would lead us farther than we ought to go; when it is in danger of connecting us with those whose society we ought not to cultivate; when it would bring us into an intercourse with the world inconsistent with our essential duties; when we perceive that it encroaches on the habits which we have learnt from the gospel; or when by dissipating our minds, it is in danger of withdrawing us from the discipline, or disqualifying us for the duties, of religion.

Those who are governed more by inclination than by principle, are seldom disposed to allow the danger of an indulgence, from which they receive much private satisfaction. Because that which they are admonished to avoid is not positively unlawful, and becomes pernicious only from its excess or from its consequences, they defend their practice by denying that their gaiety is carried to excess, and are not willing in the mean time to examine its moral effects minutely.

On this point it is sufficient to say, that both the excess and the effects may be safely appealed to their own consciences, and to their deliberate reflections. It is impossible to deny, that every man "professing godliness" is as really under an obligation to relinquish that which he has found from experience to be pernicious to the general influence of religion on his mind, or to his fidelity in particular duties; or which he knows to have exposed him to dangerous temptations; as he can be bound to practise self-denial in any other instance which can be mentioned. We may disguise the matter to ourselves as long as the strength of our animal spirits is entire. But there is a time approaching, when the sentence we shall pronounce on our conduct will be equally dispassionate and just. Our habits in the present life, and the innocence or the danger which ought to be ascribed to them, will then be estimated by their inseparable connection with our final condition as immortal beings. There is a striking admonition given by the apostle Paul, which ought not to be read without the most solemn attention. "Brethren, the time is short;—it remaineth—

that they who rejoice be as though they rejoiced not;—for the fashion of this world passeth away*.”

Another example may be taken from the character of those whose natural temper is ardent or sanguine, who must have more occasion than cooler men for the exercise of self-denial.

This peculiarity of temper is in itself neither a vice nor a defect; but, on the contrary, if it is restrained within the limits of duty, may be made subservient to the most important purposes in human conduct. It renders men of principle the most active, the most useful, the most faithful members of the societies to which they belong, and of the church of God. Their natural ardour, chastened by principle and restrained by habit, exerts itself where it has full scope, for the glory of God, for the advantage of human life, and for the various ends and duties on which either their usefulness or their fidelity depends.

But the same general character, when it is kept under no effectual restraint, involves qualities of the most pernicious kind. Of this truth,

* 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31.

those to whom the character belongs, have almost universally the same experience. The heat of their temper, the violence of their passions, and even the ardour of their good affections, excited by frequent temptations, and indulged without restraint, not only bring them into situations in which they act in opposition to their most deliberate intentions, but as they advance in life, render the impulse of the moment too often sufficient to overwhelm the most powerful considerations both of duty and of religion.

Men allow themselves to believe that as long as their sanguine character has led them into nothing habitual, in contradiction to the positive law of the gospel, they have no reason to condemn themselves with severity. They do not consider, that every disposition of the human heart, which is permanently indulged beyond its due measure, operates as an effectual obstruction to the spirit of religion; and that the influence of strong passions, which are neither watched nor restrained, has a gradual progress in the characters of mankind, extending itself insensibly, from single violations of

duty to general manners, and from early infirmities to confirmed habits.

The self-command which enables a Christian to restrain the natural impetuosity of his mind, so as to render it uniformly or habitually subservient to his personal duties, is certainly a great attainment. But without it, religion maintains no decided influence on human conduct ; and though the best of us possess it in very different degrees, all our perseverance in it is accompanied with a proportional progress in the spirit of religion, and with an inward satisfaction which more than rewards us for every struggle which it requires.

The varieties in our tempers and situations, produce a proportional variety in the objects of our self-denial. The restraint which is essential to the progress of religion in one man's mind, does not relate to the points in which self-command is of most importance to another.

Those who have from Nature a cool or a frigid temperament, have seldom a struggle to maintain either with the gaiety or with the impetuosity of their minds. But they have to combat what it is perhaps more difficult to overcome ; the lan-

guor of affections which are seldom roused, and which are never warm ; or the cold insensibility of mind which receives or retains no strong impressions. It is not without a struggle with themselves, that they enter deeply into any subject, or earnestly into any duty. It requires both great strength of principle, and much of the grace of God, who “ quickeneth whomsoever he will,” to keep their minds alive to the minute practice of religion ; and it is still more difficult to influence their conduct by means of religious affections, or to bring them into the state of mind which the apostle expresses by “ peace and joy in believing.”

This idea suggests another. There is in all men a tendency to sloth, more fatal to the influence of religion than the effect of many temptations. Whatever our general resolutions are, if we are not constantly on our guard, there is an indolence which is apt to work itself into our habits by imperceptible degrees ; soliciting us to neglect the discipline of our own minds ; to neglect the exercises of devotion on which so much of the spirit of religion depends ; to neglect the duties which require from us any sen-

sible exertion or self-denial; to suspend the vigilance by which we ought to arm ourselves against our peculiar temptations; to allow ourselves to be engrossed by the concerns of this transitory life, and to bestow but a small portion either of our thoughts or of our time on the permanent interests of the world to come.

To resist this tendency of the mind in its rise and its progress, there is a self-denial which, how different soever their peculiar tempers are, Christians must practise all their lives, and which is essential to their fidelity in every department of duty. A good man "commits the keeping of his soul to God," and expects from his influence and grace the salutary effects of his own vigilance. But, on the other hand, it must be evident, that he who will not "deny himself," so as to maintain an effectual struggle against the sloth, which strikes at the root of religion in his mind, and of all its practice in the world, cannot be the disciple of Christ.

I think it unnecessary to mention any other minute examples on this part of the subject. But it is of importance to add, that he who would possess or preserve the spirit of vital

religion in his own life, is under an indispensable obligation to relinquish, with a firm and decided resolution, whatsoever he knows from his experience to have a pernicious influence on the temper of his mind, on the turn of his thoughts, on the affections which he ought to cultivate, or on those which he is bound to subdue, on the faithful employment of his time, or on the vigorous exercise of his talents.

No man renounces self-denial in these instances, who does not sacrifice both his present tranquillity and his general happiness. On the other hand, it requires both faith and fortitude to persist in the course of duty which the text prescribes. But that which is begun in weakness shall be perfected in power. He whose faith in the Son of God has really taught him self-denial, "shall go from strength to strength." His struggles with himself become every day less, in proportion to his perseverance; and the farther he advances, the path of life is smoother before him. His power over himself, and the earnestness with which he applies to his essential duties, increase in proportion to the experience which he acquires; and that course of

life which a worldly man contemplates with perpetual impatience or disgust, is the source of his purest and most permanent satisfactions.

On the other hand it is certain, that no man becomes so perfect in this world, as to have no more struggles to maintain. Every successive period of human life brings forward new temptations, or new circumstances to convince us, that we have still inclinations which require to be watched or to be subdued. Our warfare must, therefore, be firmly supported to the end of our probation; and "patience" must have "its perfect work," till we are "perfect and entire, wanting nothing*."

But let it not be imagined that this doctrine supposes Christianity in practice to require a severity of discipline, or a degree of patience, to which there is nothing analogous in the other pursuits of human life. To be satisfied on this subject, we have only to represent to ourselves the self-denial requisite in order to acquire the qualifications necessary for any art or profession; the labour and patience inseparable from the exercise of every man's particular occupa-

* James i. 4.

tion; the many sacrifices which we are compelled to make of our inclinations, both to very distant expectations, and to the most uncertain prospects of success in life; the drudgery, the hardships, the self-government, to which men patiently submit in their worldly affairs, for the sake of what is at last but a transitory reward, even when they are permitted to attain it.

The happiness and prosperity of human life depend on the practice and on the effects of self-denial in all these different instances. Christianity prescribes a discipline of much less severity. The reward which it annexes to our perseverance, in the mean time, is far greater. The ultimate result which it presents to our view, is incomparably more certain, and is beyond our highest hope. The perfection of our nature, and our happiness through eternal ages, are to compensate our fidelity during the period of a short probation. "Every man," says the apostle, "that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things; now they do this to obtain a corruptible crown, but we *to obtain* an incorruptible*."

* 1 Cor. ix. 25.

That “the children of this world” may not be always “wiser than the children of light,” let us “suffer the word of exhortation.” “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God*.” “If any man will come after” him, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow” him †.

“Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, amen. ‡.”

* Heb. xii. 1, 2.

† Luke ix. 23.

‡ Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

SERMON IV.

ON

THE FORM OF GODLINESS.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 5.

“ Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”*

THIS text represents to us one of the leading or prominent characters of the last ages, of which so many descriptions are given us in the New Testament. “ This know also,” the apostle says at the beginning of this chapter, “ that in the last days perilous times shall come.” He exhibits a variety of melancholy features in the character of the times to which he alludes,

* Preached February 12. 1801, the day appointed by the King for a General Fast.

and completes the representation of them by affirming in the text, that men shall then “have the form of godliness, who deny the power thereof.”

He had not in his view the hypocrites of any age, who conceal their true characters under the mask of religion; or who cover their secret depravity by a high-sounding zeal for religious doctrines, or by a strict or ostentatious observation of religious rites. Though hypocrites have abounded in all ages of the world, and though hypocrisy may be used to cover any vice or crime, the terms “boasters, blasphemers, truce-breakers, traitors, high-minded men,” found in the verses preceding this text, are certainly not the descriptions of hypocrisy; but, on the contrary, must be applied to men whose conduct is both decided and avowed. And as the different parts of the apostle’s description are manifestly applied to the same characters and to the same periods, and are all summed up or comprehended in the text before us, it is certain that it is not of hypocrites of whom he intended to say, that “they have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof.” On the contrary, the leading features of the

characters which he meant to describe, are the reverse of hypocrisy. Hypocrites do not “deny the power of godliness,” but they falsely and insincerely profess to feel its power. Their zeal for *the forms* is employed to conceal the falsehood by which they pretend to the spirit of religion. They are conscious of the power which religion possesses in the characters of good men; and it is to persuade the world, in contradiction to the fact, that they have the personal experience of its influence, that all their hypocrisy is employed.

The characters to which the apostle’s description is applied, are manifestly the characters of men who reject the substance of Christianity, while they profess to acknowledge or to contend for the forms of it: of men, whose general manners are an explicit disavowal of the authority of religion, and of its power to bind the conscience, notwithstanding the zeal which they express for its external rites. The apostle represents minutely the manners of those whom he describes, contrasting them with “the form of godliness” which they assume; and the peculiar features which he attributes to their cha-

racters, he affirms to be the leading and peculiar features of “the last, or perilous times,” of which he meant to forewarn the church of Christ.

In the language of the New Testament, “the last days” do not signify the last years of the world: but in general represent the whole period from the first promulgation of Christianity to the time when the world shall end, as distinguished from the early and intermediate ages. And though the apostle certainly intended to admonish the believers generally, that Christianity held out to them no exemption from the perils arising either from unprincipled men or from false brethren; his minute description of “the perilous times” to which the whole section from the beginning of this chapter relates, must be interpreted and applied by means of the prominent characters which he assigns to them.

The manners which he describes may certainly be found in different ages. But it is our business to consider how far they have fallen under our own observation, or are applicable to our own times: for we may be fully assured, that if such characters of “the perilous times”

are come down to us, we have strong reasons indeed for repentance, and most impressive admonitions both from the word and from the providence of God. I shall,

I. Inquire how far the present times are distinguished by men's attachment to "the form of godliness." II. Consider how far it appears from the characters specified by the apostle, that the same men "*deny* the power of godliness," who are zealous in contending for "the form" of it. And then, III. Endeavour to make application of the doctrine, by illustrating the apostle's admonition, "to turn away" from the characters which this text represents to us. I am,

I. To inquire how far the present times are distinguished by an attachment to "the form of godliness."

It cannot be affirmed, that in private life there is at present any unusual attention to religious institutions, or that the observation of the forms of religion, is either more exact or more conspicuous than in former times. On the contrary, it must be admitted, though it is a melancholy truth, that the tendency of the present

times is to individual relaxation, with regard to every thing which relates to the profession or to the rites of religion. Whether our private manners are better or worse, it is certain that there is much less general solicitude to preserve the form or appearance of personal godliness, than we know to have distinguished the times of our fathers. This fact is undeniable; and I mention it now, without any other remark, than that it proves to us, that it is not in our private or individual capacities, that the present times are distinguished by any peculiar attachment to “the forms” of religion.

But there is another view of the subject, in which a zealous contention for “the forms” of religion, has certainly become a prominent feature of the age in which we live.

The infidelity and the crimes which have for so many years desolated Europe, have sounded a just alarm to the countries which have hitherto preserved their tranquillity. That unprincipled system*, which, not satisfied with dissolving the whole fabric of a corrupt church,

* Alluding to the system which produced the revolution in France.

proscribed Christianity itself as a pestilent superstition ; and which avowedly set the people loose from every Christian institution, and from every rite which bears the name of religion ; was naturally dreaded everywhere, as the harbinger of the anarchy and crimes, which were its first *effects*. Men who would have felt little for religion, trembled for the public order and for the civil government of their own country. They began to perceive, that the innovations which commence with the contempt of religious institutions, trample on every thing else in their progress ; till at last, with the altar, which they profess to overthrow, they level every other establishment essential to the existence of political society.

From these impressions, derived from events which are but yet in their progress, has arisen a solicitude for public religion, and for the preservation of religious institutions, so general and impressive, as to give a character to the present time. Men of every order have been roused : and professing to feel alike, notwithstanding the diversity of their private characters, have ranged themselves with the same apparent zeal, among

those who contend earnestly for the religious establishments, and who profess to see the importance of guarding them from neglect or violation.

It is a most interesting fact to those who are sincerely attached to the gospel, that, in all the variety of ranks and characters around them, every dispassionate man professes to feel the importance of the ordinances of religion, and at least pretends to give his help in maintaining their authority. Every man who calls himself a friend to good order or to good government, a friend to the laws or to the prosperity of his country, expresses a strong persuasion of the importance of the institutions of Christianity to the best interests of human life, and of the necessity of preserving their salutary influence on the conditions of the people. There is a conviction, more impressive than ever, among every description of men, not only that religion and religious rites are essential to the order and happiness of mankind; but that fidelity to the king and to the laws is not to be separated from a zeal to support the authority and the forms of religion.

The impressions which this language conveys would be important indeed, if men were as zealous for personal as for public religion ; if they were as much in earnest in contending for the substance of Christianity, as they profess to be for maintaining its external institutions ; if they were as solicitous for the sanctification and salvation of the people, and for their own sanctification by the faith of the gospel, as they profess to be for the order and tranquillity of the world, to which they would render the institutions of Christianity subservient ; and if their reverence for Christ and for his ordinances, had the same place in their private conduct, which they profess to give it in their political opinions.

There are certainly men of whom all this can be truly said ; men, too, who have been roused by means of the events which I have mentioned, to think more seriously than they did before, of the importance of practical and personal religion, as well as of Christian institutions, to the present and eternal interests of mankind ; men, who are prepared to contend for the substance, more than they ever contended for “ the forms of godliness ;” however important they

believe these to be to the happiness and salvation of the world.

But, humbling as the reflection is, it cannot be pretended or affirmed with truth, that this is in any respect the general character of the present times ; or that the solicitude for private and personal, bears any proportion to the zeal which has been professed for public and external religion.

Men, heated by the controversies of the day, acquire a zeal for the forms of religion, which has but little relation to their personal conduct, and which does not go beyond the circumstances which produced it. They imagine that they see the importance of religion to the present tranquillity of the world ; and are therefore willing to give their help, or at least, when it is directly put to them, to give their voice, to preserve its external institutions. But they have not allowed themselves to observe, that public without personal religion can have no substantial or permanent effects. They have not brought themselves to consider Christianity as that which ought to come home to their own minds ; as it binds the conscience ; as it becomes the govern-

ing principle of human conduct ; as it holds out Christ to the world as “ the wisdom of God and the power of God to every one who believeth ;” or as it persuades men “ to work out their salvation with fear and trembling,” before it becomes, in any instance, the principle of fidelity in the duties of the present life.

It is certain, that the external rites may be strictly observed, when they are completely separated from the spirit of religion. Men may contend earnestly for the institutions of Christianity, who are personally indifferent both to its substance and to its general design. “ The forms of godliness” may acquire an importance as a branch of a political system, which is not conceded to them as the ordinances of Christ, or as the means of salvation.

But the text before us goes a step farther than any of these suppositions. It affirms, that “ in the perilous times,” men “ shall have a form of godliness, who shall deny the power thereof :” and the meaning of the assertion is obviously this, that they shall not only be indifferent to the substance or the power of Christianity, while they contend for “ the forms of it ;” but shall

go so far as to deny that it has a substance or a power to reach the conscience, or to bind it.

This is a strong assertion, when applied to any species or appearance of zeal for religion. But the apostle has referred us to specific facts, on which every application of his assertion must depend; and which deserve to be considered with the most solemn attention as the characters given us of "the perilous times." I am now, therefore,

II. To consider, how far it appears from the characters specified by the apostle, that the same men "deny the power of godliness," who are zealous in contending for "the form" of it.

It is obvious, that men will not readily deny in words, the substance of Christianity, while they profess to maintain the authority of its institutions. It is only from their conduct, or from their peculiar manners, that we can learn their real views and impressions.

The apostle has given us a most minute description of the manners which he connects with "the perilous times." "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own

selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy; without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

The manners which are here enumerated, do not convey to us the idea of the first approaches to degeneracy, or of a variety of slight deviations from principle or duty. They represent to us the hard, unprincipled, and determined, manners of an age of luxury: and these are described as united to "the form of godliness," although they contain the most explicit and direct disavowal of its power and substance*.

I cannot illustrate all the particulars which the apostle has specified, though every one of them bears directly on the point to which they

* The description has been generally, and perhaps justly, applied to the reign of Antichrist. But the apostle John tells us, (1 John ii. 18.) that in "the last time," "there are many Antichrists."

are applied. But I shall turn your attention to a few of them as examples; and consider how far the description is in these articles applicable to our times. The particulars which I select are these following: "Men shall be lovers of their ownelves, and covetous,—blasphemers,—lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God,—despisers of those that are good."

(1.) It is affirmed, that "in the perilous times, men shall be lovers of their ownelves, and covetous."

The assertion is plainly this, that selfishness and rapacity were to constitute one of the peculiar features of those times; and that the selfish passions, the love of gain, and the rage for wealth, were then to become general or predominating characters among all the orders of the people.

It is impossible not to perceive, in the character of our own country, that the rage for wealth has gradually diffused itself through the various conditions of the people, and above the proportion of the means of attaining it; till it has gone as far beyond the experience as the anticipations of former times. Expensive living

and expensive pleasures have had an unexampled progress among the different ranks of men: and to support them, there is a degree of general rapacity created, which assumes all the various aspects which it can derive from the variety of our conditions; and which it is more useful to deplore than to describe. With all the strong impressions we receive of public and of private* calamities, every man pursues his separate interests steadily and firmly, unconscious of the influence of his success to add to the pressure of the times, or disregarding it; while the gains of no individual man awaken our alarms, amidst the accumulations and cupidity of the multitude around him.

There is an infinite variety in the aspects, which the spirit of the world and the spirit of selfishness assume; and in the false virtues, united to the profusion and the rapacities of the present times, there are as many striking, or at least apparent contradictions. But the facts which I have mentioned, are sufficient to give

* Alluding to the scarcity in 1800-1801, when this sermon was preached.

us a precise idea of the apostle's description; "men shall be lovers of their own selves, and covetous."

Christ has said to us, "ye cannot serve God and Mammon." It is possible to have all the selfishness of the world, and, at the same time, to support "the forms" of religion. In as far as these are supposed to contribute to the tranquillity of nations, it is natural to believe that they are not useless in promoting the prosperity of selfish men. It is as easy to conceive, why men should contend for them earnestly, and should be active in guarding them from violation, as long as they see in them the means of security or of advantage to the world, though they carry their views no higher.

But, on the other hand, it is impossible that the same men should not "deny the power of godliness," amidst all their zeal for "the forms of it." The godliness which restrains their selfishness, which condemns their avarice, which forbids their unhallowed gains, and which commands them "to repent in dust and ashes," they cannot either reverence or receive, till they cease to be what they are. "The power"

which they do not feel, and which they are resolute in resisting, they must and do “deny.” They contend for “the forms of godliness;” but in “the forms” their religion terminates. If these shall help in any degree to promote the tranquillity of the world, they afford a sufficient motive for their attachment to them. But their zeal, proceeding from such a motive, is nothing better than the clamour of the craftsmen of Ephesus, who “made their gain by the shrines of Diana,” and who cried out together against the apostles of the Lord, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians*.” They are as hostile to “the power of godliness” which binds the conscience, which “purifies the heart,” and which determines men “to seek first the kingdom of God,” as the most inveterate of the craftsmen of Ephesus were, or as the most resolute unbelievers are.

The conclusion from this representation is melancholy indeed. But it is the result of facts which every man may examine for himself; and it is useful for us to consider it, if we would guard our zeal for “the forms of godliness,” by

* Acts xix. 34.

our full persuasion and our awe of its “power:” if we would separate the true spirit of Christianity, from the zeal which is guided by the spirit of the world, and “would not be partakers of other men’s sins.”

(2.) The apostle affirms of “the perilous times,” that men shall then be “blasphemers,” although they shall notwithstanding have “the form of godliness.”

Blasphemy is the highest and most pointed expression of irreverence for God, which men can convey by words; of irreverence for the name or for the attributes of God; of irreverence for the name, for the doctrine, or for the authority, of Christ.

There can be but few examples of solemn blasphemy; because there are not many occasions to produce it. But the blasphemy of the profane is perpetual: and it has unhappily been, for ages, observed to form a remarkable feature in the character of our own country*. The shocking oaths or imprecations which are employed to embellish the most frivolous or unmeaning conversation, or to give something like point or

* Henry’s History, vol. x. ch. 7. octavo edition.

energy to the gaiety, or to the passionate declamations, of unprincipled men, have been the reproach of every age, and are more and more incorporated with the manners of every rank of the people.

But it was reserved for “the perilous times” to bring forward, from the different conditions of life, profane men, who, without any active part assigned them, and with no personal awe of religion, should publicly unite to contend with zeal for “the forms of godliness.” Men stand up among us to deplore the progress of infidelity, and its ravages on the earth, eager to bring forward their personal solicitude for *the preservation* and for the reverence of religion among the people; who can scarcely find words to express their zeal, without blaspheming “by heaven and by him that dwelleth therein;” by “Christ the Son of the living God,” and by every “other manner of oath.” They contend at this moment for “the forms” of religion, as if they involved the most important interests of human life; and they cannot speak of the most common things, in the most common way, without the most direct and unqualified profa-

nation of the name of God; in utter contempt of every thing which pertains to godliness, either in form or in substance. We find this character of our degeneracy, not merely among the dissipated and thoughtless youth, whose principles and manners are not yet established, or among ignorant and empty declaimers, who have no knowledge or no character; but we find it also, among men who possess a good understanding on other subjects, and even among those who have both superior reputation and abilities in the management of affairs. The inveteracy of habits, which it requires nothing but the awe of principle to correct, is the only defence of their profanity which they will venture to plead: and even this they will mention with confidence, though they are conscious that they are deliberately indulging their profanity, in direct violation of every principle both of duty and religion.

Shall men like these—"blasphemers" of religion, even at the moment when they most avow themselves the enemies of infidelity—shall *they* become the guardians or the champions of godliness? Every form attributed to re-

ligion is blasted on the lips of profanity; and every thing which is peculiar to the substance or the "power of godliness," the language of profanity resolutely and publicly "denies." He who lives from day to day, blaspheming the God of heaven, cannot be conceived to believe, that godliness *has* a substance or "a power," in which either his duties or his personal happiness are involved.

It is a most impressive duty among religious men, to unite steadily to promote and to preserve the reverence of God among the people, and "the power of godliness." But it is their duty also, to receive, with reverence and awe, the striking admonitions given them by "blasphemers," who contend for "the forms of godliness." They verify the characters of "the last days," of which "the spirit speaketh expressly." They warn us of "the perils," of which they are declared to be the signal. They shew us how earnestly we are bound "to contend" for the substance and for the practical influence of "the faith once delivered to the saints;" and they certainly afford us the strongest and most urgent reasons to fast and pray together.

(3.) The apostle says of “the perilous times,” that men shall then “be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”

Those who are accustomed to observe and to estimate living manners, cannot but perceive, how high the encreasing luxury and wealth of our country have raised “the love of pleasure;” how it has grown and spread from the first to the last orders of the people; how almost every interest and pursuit gives way to it among the higher ranks; and how much even the middle orders of men sacrifice to it, of their health, of their precious time, of their money, of their labour, of their private comfort, of their domestic habits, of their serious hours, and of their best duties.

One class of men pursue it as their chief business; and another class, who profess to cultivate more sobriety of mind, find themselves unable either to restrain or to resist the torrent of fashionable manners, notwithstanding the pressure both of war and of famine*, and the cries of poverty around them. They admit, that we

* The scarcity and the exorbitant price of provisions were at this time most severely felt.

are receiving the most striking admonitions of Providence ; they do not profess to disregard them ; and yet at this moment the succession of their festivities is scarcely kept from encroaching on the solemnities of religion. The love of pleasure is the predominating passion of the present times ; which gathers fuel and strength from all our prosperity, and which receives scarcely any check from our heaviest and most humbling calamities.

Can it be seriously denied, that the men of the present time “ are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God ? ” What species or form of pleasures do they deliberately and permanently sacrifice to their sense of God ; to the warnings he has given them ; to the present aspect of Providence around them ; or to the general considerations of duty or religion ? They assume “ the form of godliness,” and are forward in expressing their zeal for maintaining it. But in their personal conduct, do they relinquish either their pleasures or their business, that “ they may sanctify the Lord’s day, or keep it holy ; ” or do they give their time, or give their perso-

nal countenance, even to "the form of godliness," for which they profess to contend?

There is a great variety of characters amongst us. But I say it confidently, that there is in the present time a more marked disrespect to the ordinances of religion, more of the pursuit of pleasure in defiance of the authority of religion, and more open profanations of the Lord's Day, (which becomes more and more a day both of pleasure and of business) than has ever before been observed in this place.

It is obvious that I do not speak of those who have in any degree imbibed the spirit of religion. But I refer to multitudes of men who have of late been most clamorous against the effects of infidelity, and who, from political motives, have expressed much solicitude to preserve our religious institutions.

If they have ever been in earnest in the attachment they have professed to the ordinances of Christ, they have at least proved themselves "to be lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." They have at least proved, that in whatever light they regard "the form," they explicitly "deny the power of godliness;" since

they do not permit the awe of God either to set bounds to their pleasures, or to determine their conduct.

What can come more directly home to the apostle's description of the perilous times? Men give themselves to pleasures and not to God. Though they contend for "the forms" of external religion as a political system, "they deny" or disavow "the power of godliness," in as far as it is hostile to their manners, and forbids the pleasures which they will not abandon.

(4.) The apostle says of "the perilous times," that men shall then "be despisers of those that are good."

This part of the description goes deep into the characters which he meant to represent.

Men are often in earnest in the zeal which they express for the authority of religion, who have not been able to realise in their practice even their own ideas of their personal duties. But when this is the case, conscious of their sincerity, they at least regard with respect and love those whom they believe to be purer than themselves, or consider as better maintaining

their fidelity to their common master. They contemplate with sensible interest and satisfaction their fervor, their holy conversation, and every good work which they accomplish.

This is universally the temper of good men towards one another, notwithstanding the diversity in their personal characters, and all the variety of their talents.

But, on the other hand, it is as universally true, that the spirit of the world is in perpetual enmity with the spirit of Christ. Men who have no more than "the form of godliness," and harden themselves against "the power of it," look with perpetual jealousy or disgust on those who are more in earnest than themselves "in obeying the gospel."

This character of "the perilous times" is perfectly consonant with the general view which Christianity has given us of the spirit of the world. "The world hath hated them," said our Lord of his disciples, "because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*." Cain hated Abel, and slew him,

* John xvii. 14.

“because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous* ;” “yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution †.”

He who “denies the power of godliness,” will never look with respect on those who abide by it. That light, superficial, and formal religion, which does not reach the heart, and which has no real influence on men’s conduct, or on their motives, is all the religion which he either professes or acknowledges. But his own mind will often involuntarily tell him, that better men know Christianity better, because they find in it the power which he denies ; and because while he receives from it no sensible satisfactions, they “rejoice in it with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” This reproach he will not forget ; and for this reproach, he becomes a perpetual “despiser of them who are good.”

It is a melancholy character of “perilous times,” that men who contend merely for “the forms” of religion, and who have nothing more, teach themselves, and encourage one another, to despise those who have imbibed the spirit of it.

* 1 John iii. 12.

† 2 Tim. iii. 12.

There is not a degree of inveteracy betwixt man and man, which goes beyond the contempt or hatred of those who have no more of religion than its form, for every species or appearance of serious, personal, or vital godliness. What they cannot despise as hypocrisy, they persecute as narrow or illiberal; and the conduct which they cannot condemn as corrupt, they affect to despise for what they affirm to be its useless strictness or severity. They receive every surmise with avidity, to the prejudice of men who profess to feel "the power of godliness." They embrace every calumny against them with eagerness; and they set down every circumstance of aggravation with a malignant satisfaction.

Is this kind of malignity suspended, when men have begun to express an unusual zeal for external religion? The spirit of the world is ever at the same variance with the spirit of Christ; and those who "have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof," the more they express their zeal for something which is not godliness, are just so much the more determined "despisers of them who are good."

The characters given us of “the perilous times,” ought to render the subject I have endeavoured to illustrate, most interesting to us; and the present aspect of Providence should lead us to review it with the most solemn attention.

I have considered, 1. How far the present times are distinguished by an attachment to “the forms of godliness;” and then, 2. How far it appears, from the characters specified, that the same men “deny the power of godliness,” who are zealous in contending for “the form of it.”

I have illustrated but a few of the characters mentioned by the apostle, though there are others in his enumeration which are equally striking. In one discourse I could attempt no more; but the specimens I have given are sufficient to enable us to examine every part of the description.

Permit me now to direct your thoughts,

III. To the application of the doctrine.

The apostle first affirms, that “in the perilous times, men shall be lovers of their own-selves, and covetous—blasphemers—lovers of

pleasures more than lovers of God—despisers of them who are good.” He then subjoins his exhortation to the believers, concerning the conduct which they ought to observe with regard to such characters: “From such turn away.”

We are often in danger of being deceived by words or appearances, when we have not examined the substance of that to which they relate. An ardent or a conspicuous zeal for “the form of godliness,” may be easily mistaken for a persuasion of its “power.” But we are required to try the professions of religion, by their effects on men’s lives, and on their visible manners. We “do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles;” and “a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit.” Men may certainly “profess to know God,” and to reverence his institutions, though their general temper and manners demonstrate that they deny Him, and despise them.

I have stated fairly the characters to which the text refers, so as to enable you to judge of them; and to whomsoever such characters apply, the apostle admonishes and commands us, “from such to turn away.” He says, with a

similar minuteness, to the Philippians, “many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things*.”

Guard yourselves, my brethren, against the influence and the manners of men of corrupt minds. Some intercourse we must have with active men of the most different characters, “or else (as the Scripture says) we must go out of the world †.” But in the general intercourse, which cannot be avoided, it is a most impressive duty “to watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation,” and that we may be able to keep our hearts and our manners equally uncorrupted by the influence and by the example of unprincipled men. We have all the natural and external symptoms of difficult and “perilous times” around us; the miseries of scarcity, and the calamities of war, added to the most alarming series of political convulsions in the neighbouring states. The internal symptoms which I have

* Philip. iii. 18, 19.

† 1 Cor. v. 10,

represented, are not less visible, arising from the perversion of our manners and opinions.

And what should be necessary, besides these circumstances, to rouse us to prayer and to fasting? It is certain that we are not without our share in the national degeneracy; and the admonition of this day ought to come home to our hearts. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, consider your ways*." "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up †." "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come forth from the presence of the Lord ‡." "The form of godliness" will always be precious to faithful men; but its spirit and power alone are "life and peace." Wherefore, my brethren, "suffer the word of exhortation." Religion is of the last importance to the present and eternal interests of mankind; and the "forms of godliness" are essential to the means of promoting and preserving its influence in the world. Let nothing be wanting on your part, to guard the institutions of religion from irreverence and

* Hag. i. 5.

† James iv. 10.

‡ Acts iii. 19.

neglect; and at least endeavour to distinguish yourselves by your personal adherence to them, in opposition to all the perversion of others. But watch the temper of your minds, and do not suffer your zeal to be polluted by the spirit of the world. Let your attention be chiefly fixed on the substance of Christianity, that personal religion may be the chief object of your zeal, and may animate all your solicitude for “the forms of godliness.”

Finally, brethren, “let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have*.” “Stand in awe, and sin not †.” “Keep yourselves in the love of God ‡,” amidst all the corruption of the world; heartily united with “the faithful in Christ Jesus” in every good work, and “striving together for the faith of the gospel §.”

* Heb. xiii. 5.

† Psalms iv. 4.

‡ Jude v. 21.

§ Philip. i. 27.

SERMON V.

ON

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND MORALITY.

PHILIPPIANS i. 27.

—“*That ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.*”

“**T**HE faith of the gospel” is published to mankind as the last and most perfect revelation of the will of God. It contains the only certain assurance of the mercy of God to sinners; and to those who receive it, it is the only authoritative doctrine of human obligations.

Genuine religion, among those to whom the gospel is sent, is nothing but “the faith of the gospel” in practice, applied to every situation of the human mind. A man is a Christian only

in as far as his faith in the doctrines of Christ possesses a uniform influence on his affections and on his conduct. The apostle could scarcely have represented practical Christianity in more comprehensive terms, than when he supposes the believers “to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

He had no intention, by introducing the terms “striving together,” to make any allusion to the contentions, of which religion has so frequently been made the pretence or the occasion. This language is simply designed to express the earnestness, and the union of good men in adhering to “the faith of the gospel,” in opposition to the malignity, the corruption, and the infidelity of the world.

There are two different lights in which the subject suggested by this text may be considered.

We may suppose the apostle to have had in his eye the substance, and the practical influence, of “the faith of the gospel.” And in both these views, inseparably connected, I shall

endeavour to illustrate the steadfastness of true believers.

I suppose the representation of the text to relate,

I. To the substance of “ the faith of the gospel.”

It will be easily perceived, that in mentioning *the substance* of the gospel, I do not merely refer to the principles on which all religion depends; the existence and providence of God, or the moral obligations of men. These are original principles, which must be inseparable from every idea of religion. But though they are involved in the substance of Christianity, they do not form its discriminating or peculiar features. In referring to them at present, I consider them as inseparable from the doctrines, by which the gospel is distinguished from every other revelation, and from every other form of religion.

The doctrines which relate to the restoration of the human race, and which the gospel employs “ to guide our feet into the way of peace,” were, in the wisdom of God, unfolded by many gradations, from the earliest to the latest revelation: the light gradually opening and expanding from

one age to another, as the time approached when the full revelation was to be given. The last revelation from heaven neither did nor could become complete, till the events on which it depended were accomplished. Christianity is built on the incarnation, the obedience, the death, and the resurrection of the Son of God, for the redemption of the world. Before the period of these events, the faith of good men, in the peculiar dispensation of their own times, answered the immediate purposes of practical religion; whilst it uniformly referred to a purer and better system, to be afterwards unfolded. The ancient believers joined to the knowledge which they possessed, their reliance on the full revelation to come; and though they had not received the accomplishment of the original promises of redemption, they lived "and died* in the faith" of them; deriving from them their purest motives, and resting on them their best expectations.

If this was the state of the ancient church, the believers of the gospel cannot surely be under less obligation, now that the revelation is

* Heb. xi. 13—16.

complete, and its promulgation general, to abide steadily by their peculiar faith, or “to strive earnestly together” to preserve its substance entire. Practical Christianity is not to be separated from the great articles of the Christian doctrine, or from their continued influence and authority in the minds of those who sincerely believe them.

According to the gospel, we rest our hopes of the mercy of God to sinners, and of our personal salvation from sin and death, on the mediation of the Son of God betwixt God and man; on the merit of his “obedience unto death” for our redemption *; on the power of his resurrection from the grave †; on the efficacy of his intercession in heaven through the blood of the atonement ‡; on the supreme dominion with which he is invested, for the security and the eternal salvation of those “who come unto God by him ||;” on the promise of the Father” by him, “to give the Holy Spirit to

* 1 Tim. ii. 5. 6. Rom. iii. 23---26. Ch. v. 21.

† Philip. iii. 10. Rom. vi. 9---11. 1 Thess. iv. 14.

‡ Heb. vii. 25. Heb. ix. 12---24.

|| Philip. ii. 9---11. Rev. i. 17. 18.

them who ask him § ;” on the certainty of the general resurrection of the dead, when “ he shall appear the second time, without sin unto salvation * ;” and on the sovereign authority which is given him, “ to judge the quick and the dead ” at the last day, “ according to their works † .”

He who is a Christian indeed, while he relies steadily on the original principles on which all religion depends, receives these essential articles of the doctrine of Christ as the substance of his peculiar faith. He abides by the hope which is founded on them “ as the anchor of his soul.” He rests on his persuasion of their certainty, his most important interests in this world, and in the world to come. The considerations which he derives from them have an influence in regulating and purifying the state of his mind, as well as in determining his personal conduct, superior to the effect of all other considerations whatsoever. And he is conscious, that, independent of them, he would be destitute both of principles and of consolations.

§ Luke xi. 13. Luke xxiv. 49.

* St John v. 28. 29. Heb. ix. 28.

† Matthew xxv. 31---46.

On the other hand, it is not possible to conceive, that a man can be in earnest in the faith of Christianity, who has no settled persuasion of the truth or importance of its distinguishing tenets, or who deliberately allows himself to regard them with neglect or with indifference. If the peculiar information which the gospel has given us concerning the doctrine of salvation by Christ, were either uninteresting in itself, or might, in any case, be neglected with safety, Christianity could not be true, and our faith would indeed be vain.

We may certainly have different views of the same doctrines, without departing from the substance of our faith. We have not all the same strength of understanding, nor the same clear perception of the doctrines laid down to us: and unintentional errors or mistakes will not destroy our union with sound believers. But a Christianity, which professes to take no serious interest in the doctrines of Christ and his apostles, concerning the apostacy and the redemption of the world, must to every man, who is himself in earnest, appear to be far removed from "the faith of the gospel."

There are many ways in which unbelievers disguise their aversion to the Christian doctrine, when they are unwilling to avow it, and in which the false pretenders to Christianity conceal their indifference. But there is no expedient which they more frequently adopt, or in which they are more generally united, than that by which they endeavour to set the morality of the gospel in opposition to its doctrines: When they represent the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity, either as matters of no intrinsic importance, or as subjects “of doubtful disputation;” while they affect to extol its morality, as containing within itself every thing which is valuable in religion, or which ought to be interesting to mankind.

The morality of the gospel is indeed of the last importance; and is pure as the source from which it comes. It embraces the full extent of human obligations. It is the clear and indispensable rule by which the believers of Christianity are required to prove the sincerity and the steadfastness of their faith; the decisive rule by which their characters are to be estimated in this world, and by which their fidelity shall at last

be tried at the tribunal of God. I shall be able to shew, under the second branch of the subject, how essential to Christianity its morality is, and of how much importance it must always be, that the believers should be united in maintaining its authority.

But, in the mean time, let us not be perverted by words or sounds, so as to believe it possible, that the morality of the gospel can, in any instance, be substituted in place of its doctrines, or on any pretence set in opposition to them.

On this subject, I beseech you to consider,

(1.) That Christianity has given no new or peculiar delineation of moral duties, different from that which was given under the ancient dispensation; and that it has added nothing to the system of morality, excepting the peculiar principles or authority by which it has enforced it.

The love of God, and the love of our neighbour, were the summary of moral duties under the law of Moses, as well as by the law of Christ; and the particular duties belonging to each of these departments, were as clearly represented by the one as by the other. The sub-

stance of the same morality was even taught to the Heathens as well as to the Jews ; though not only without the advantage of a pure religion to illustrate or enforce it, but intermixed with incalculable sources of perversion, resulting from the false and pernicious maxims which the wisest Heathens adopted, as well as from the influence of barbarous superstitions and idolatries.

The gospel is certainly far superior to every other doctrine or system of moral instruction : But it claims its pre-eminence, not because it lays down moral duties, which were not taught or known before its promulgation, but on account of the peculiar motives or sanctions by which it enforces its morality. For it is impossible not to admit, that Christian morals are brought home to the consciences of mankind, by considerations, of which it was not possible that either Jews or Heathens could avail themselves.

On the other hand, it must be obvious, that as soon as we take this view of the subject, we admit the importance of the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel ; for in them, and in them alone, are to be found the peculiar principles

by which Christianity professes to enforce the obligation of moral duties. It represents to us, no doubt, every consideration arising from our present condition which can have any influence in persuading us. But its chief and most impressive arguments for a holy life are such as the following: That “the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*.” That “if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another †:” “That Christ died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again ‡:” That “to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ §;” and that “the small and

* Titus ii. 11—14.

† 1 John iv. 11.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 15.

§ Ephes. iv. 7.

the great" shall stand at last before the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive sentence, "every man according as his works have been."

It is impossible to think of morality, as the morality of the gospel, without referring it directly to these, or to similar considerations, by which it is the peculiar office and object of the New Testament to enforce it. Referred to these principles, the morality of Christianity is incorporated with its essential doctrines; and it cannot be separated from them, without ceasing to be Christian morality.

"The faith of the gospel" not only suggests to us sound or useful motives to holiness of life, but it is, in every instance, the best security both of our ardour and fidelity in our personal duties. The apostle Paul, after enumerating to Titus* the leading doctrines of grace and sanctification represented in the gospel, subjoins to his enumeration these remarkable words: "This is a faithful saying (or, this is faithful and sound doctrine), and these things (or, these doctrines) I will that thou affirm con-

* Titus iii. 3—8.

stantly, *to the end that* * they who have believed in God may be careful to maintain good works : These things are good and profitable unto men.” He supposes, not only that the most effectual mode of teaching Christian morality consists in the faithful application of the doctrines of redemption, to inculcate or to enforce moral duties ; but that the peculiar doctrines of Christ are to be constantly taught or affirmed, with the express purpose and design of persuading the believers to be steadfast in “ maintaining good works.” He who departs from the doctrines of the gospel, under the pretence of extolling its morality, relinquishes the substance of Christian morals, as effectually as he abandons the foundations of a Christian’s hope.

I beseech you to consider,

(2.) What the morality is, which is industriously separated from the doctrines of Christianity, or is inculcated independent of its relation to them.

When I say that morality is separated from Christianity, I do not mean to affirm, that this

* *ira.*

is always directly done. It happens more frequently, that the doctrines of the gospel are passed over in silence, or are treated as subjects which a very wise or enlightened man does not think it necessary minutely to consider ; while moral duties are stated, with few exceptions, as if they had no reference to them.

Is the morality which is thus inculcated, the pure, the universal, the watchful, or the uniform morality represented in the gospel ? On the contrary, it is a morality which has seldom any relation to God, or to the duties which we owe to him ; a morality which applies chiefly, or entirely, to our present interests ; the morality which the fashion, or the general manners of the world, require ; the morality, which derives its chief motives from present situations, and from present events ; the morality of easy, pliant, and conciliating manners, which neither bears hard on the vices, nor goes deep into the consciences of mankind ; the morality by which men learn to declaim against religious zeal, and against every thing which has the aspect either of scrupulous holiness, or of earnest religion, but which can teach them to look, without any

dissatisfaction or murmur, on the dissipations of the world, on the profane, and on the sensual, and on the oppressors, and on the hardened.

Men of sound understanding ought to be able to determine for themselves, whether this is the morality of the gospel which is inculcated with scarcely any relation to it, and from every motive rather than the motives of religion; in which the lessons of moral duty, separated from the language of Christianity, are every day brought nearer to the maxims and to the manners of the world; and from which men learn, or are taught to believe, that wretched as their progress is in moral duties, they must derive from it their only hope of salvation.

The unbeliever, and the false professor of Christianity, insensibly adopt the same language. Under the pretence of setting morality and Christianity at variance, they unite their endeavours to sap the foundations of both. They first banish from their thoughts the substance, or the peculiar tenets of the gospel, as a metaphysical system which may well be spared. When they have effected this, their work is almost done: for the morality which they profess to retain, is

easily reconciled to the vices of the world ; and though it were pure, soon becomes a dead letter, separated from the principles or motives which can alone support it.

It is impossible not to remark, besides, that the supple and accommodating morality, which bends to every fashion, and accords with every new opinion ; which startles at every approach of zeal for religion, but which fears nothing from the lips of ungodliness or of infidelity ; is in its most favourable aspect, at least far removed from the holiness of heart and life, by which the sound believers of the gospel are represented in the New Testament, as becoming “ the temple of God,” and as “ having the spirit of God dwelling in them*.”—I beseech you to consider,

(3.) The essential importance of the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel to the present and eternal interests of mankind.

“ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but might have everlasting life †.” On this fact, on which Christianity

* 1 Cor. iii. 16.

† St John iii. 16.

is built, depends all our consolation as fallen creatures, when we plead for mercy at the footstool of God, or look forward with hope into the world to come. We rely on it when we pray for the remission of sins, for the help or for the grace which our situations require, or for the consolations which support us during our pilgrimage in this world. It lies at the foundation of our faith and confidence, when we look forward to our final victory over death and sin; to the certainty of the resurrection of the dead; or to “the glorious manifestation of the sons of God.” It relates to our most permanent and most precious interests; and the advantages, as well as the comfort, with which we are able to contemplate them, depends on the persuasion with which we rely on it, and on the doctrines founded on it; doctrines which contain the substance of the peculiar system of the gospel; which the gospel alone brings home to our conviction; “That God (to wit) is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them* ;” and, “that believing on Christ, we have life through his name †.”

* 2 Cor. v. 19.

† St John xx. 31.

Shall it be possible to persuade us to regard with neglect, or to think with prejudice, of doctrines on which so much must certainly depend, if Christianity is true? Shall we fall into the snare of malignant infidelity, without perceiving that it strikes at the root both of our present and of our eternal interests? Shall we permit ourselves to be seduced into the cold and languid indifference, with regard to the substance of Christianity, expressed by men who feel not "the powers of the world to come," and who are equally unconscious of the comfort and of the hopes which they abandon?

If we are Christians indeed, we will receive the doctrines of Christ as they are, and abide by them steadily, as the foundations of our personal hopes and consolations. We will "strive together" earnestly to maintain the substance of our faith entire, against all the prejudice and the malignity of the world; and neither the scorn of unbelievers, nor the example of false brethren, will have any effect to shake our conviction, or to lessen our zeal.

But the utmost attachment which we can express for the doctrines of Christ, forms but one

branch of the duty of his faithful disciples. Practical religion is of more importance than the soundest opinions; and the effects of Christianity on the personal conduct of those who profess to receive it, furnish the only decisive test by which either their characters or their faith can be tried. And therefore I am now to consider the representation of this text, as relating,

II. To the practical influence of "the faith of the gospel."

It is plain that this idea was in the apostle's mind, as well as the substance of the Christian doctrine. For the text makes a part of an exhortation to the believers, to maintain that purity in their personal conduct, "which becometh the gospel," and ought to distinguish those who embrace it. "Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye all stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."

Although it is certain that morality, separated from the doctrines of Christ, is not and cannot be genuine Christianity; but that, on the

contrary, when the separation is intentional, it is truly employed to defeat the design of our most holy faith—it is not less certain, on the other hand, that the moral or practical influence of the Christian doctrines, and the authority of the Christian law, are of the last importance to the character of the believers, and must ever belong to the essence of vital religion.

The morality of Christianity is not only in perfect agreement with its doctrines, and in every point worthy of them ; but both by its substance and by its authority is far superior to every other system of morals which has ever been published to mankind.

It will be readily admitted, that it embraces the whole extent of the moral duties, which we owe to God, or to ourselves, or to our fellow creatures ; that its authority extends to the thoughts and intents of the heart, as well as to our external conduct ; and that it is given us, not only as containing useful and important rules for the advantage of human life, but as a law which is in every point of indispensable obligation, and of which every breach subjects the offender to “ the wrath of God.”

The morality which the world professes to require, not only allows men to violate many positive duties, or to neglect them deliberately, and especially the duties which they owe to God; but it permits them to live in the indulgence of a multitude of vices, if not without reproach, at least without incurring any forfeiture of their personal character. The vices which do not contradict the prudential maxims of worldly men, or which do not encroach on their public manners, how contrary soever to the law of God, are easily reconciled to their ideas of morality, or at least are easily sheltered from the severity of their censures.

On the other hand, it is impossible not to perceive, that the law of Christ professes to incorporate itself in every point with the essential character of those whom he acknowledges as his disciples. Pure, like its Author, and, like Him, invariably the same, it admits of no deliberate or continued violations of positive duties, and of no habitual indulgence of known sins. On the contrary, it pronounces decisively with regard to those on whom such offences are chargeable,

that whatever they profess, they have forfeited their pretensions to vital Christianity.

The best of men are no doubt liable to fall both into errors and into sins, through the strength of external temptations, operating on the depravity of human nature, and the weakness of the human heart. When they do fall into them, they invariably lose their peace of mind, till they are again "renewed to repentance:" and the repentance which is required of them, is not a repentance, like "the sorrow of the world," the mere result of the present effects of their transgressions; but a repentance founded on a settled abhorrence of the sins which are the subjects of it, and an effectual and determined resolution against them. But nothing can be more certain, than that known and habitual sins, deliberately persisted in, Christianity declares, in every case, to be utterly irreconcilable with the character of true believers. It pronounces every man who lives in the deliberate violation of his known duties to God or to his fellow creatures, or in the habitual commission of known sins, as in every instance, without restriction, "an enemy to the cross of Christ."

The language which it employs on this subject is so pointed and definite, as to place every habitual violation of moral duties in complete hostility with the law of Christ. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law (says St James), and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." His meaning is not, what it is impossible to affirm, that the guilt of one offence is by itself equally heinous with the guilt of many : But he asserts, that the deliberate and habitual violation of one positive precept of the law, is the same offence against the authority of the lawgiver as the guilt of many transgressions *. The apostle John lays down the same doctrine in terms equally broad and explicit. "Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him ; and he cannot sin (that is, he cannot deliberately and habitually sin against the positive law of Christ), because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil : Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother †."

* James ii. 10, 11.

† 1 John iii. 9, 10.

No language could express more clearly, or define more precisely, either the extent or the inviolable obligation of the Christian law. It reaches every possible case of duty; and the fidelity which it requires is equally inseparable from the peculiar character of those who are placed under it, and from all the hopes and consolations which Christianity has given them.

I have mentioned already, under the first branch of the subject, the general considerations by which the gospel professes to enforce our moral duties; and the sanctions which it affixes to its positive precepts. It urges our fidelity to the law of Christ, and warns us against every deviation from it, by all the considerations which arise from the character of the human mind, and from our present interests and conditions in this world. But the chief considerations which it employs, to bind our moral duties on our consciences, as the disciples of Christ, are incorporated with the peculiar dispensation of the gospel. We are urged and persuaded, by the grace and by the promises of Christ, by our redemption through his death, by the hopes which he has given us, by the exqui-

site sufferings which he endured, "when his soul was made an offering for sin," by the justice and by "the terrors of the Lord," by "the holy conversation or godliness," which is the test of our relation to him "who hath redeemed us to God by his blood," and by the strict and minute account which every one of us shall at last be required to give of his conduct, and of his state of mind "at the judgment of the great day."

If these considerations shall not determine any individual who professes Christianity, to subject himself steadily and universally to the Christian law, as the only rule by which he is to judge and estimate his personal conduct, he is explicitly declared to be by this circumstance effectually excluded from the family of Christ. Whatever his professions are, he has no interest or portion in the blessings, or in the salvation which the gospel has published to the world. His character will not abide the test by which alone it can be tried; and while he continues in the same state of mind, "he is far from the kingdom of God." "If ye love me (said our Lord), keep my commandments. He that hath

my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me*.” The apostle John has added, “He that saith I know Christ, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected †.”

If I have stated fairly the substance, or at least the spirit of the Christian law, is it possible to form an idea of a purer, a more enlightened, or a more forcible morality, which could have been promulgated to human creatures? Or can we imagine any thing which could have been added to the authority which enforces it, or which could, in any circumstances, have rendered it more indispensable, than it is in the characters, or more binding on the consciences of true believers?

But I have a circumstance still to mention, of the utmost importance to its efficacy. Those who abide sincerely by the doctrines of Christ, are affirmed to be sanctified for the obedience of his law, by the power of “the Holy Ghost, shed on them abundantly.” We know nothing

* St John xiv. 15. and 21.

† 1 John ii. 4, 5.

of the manner in which the spirit of God operates in promoting or securing the sanctification of those to whom he is promised. Good men can only perceive his influence by its effects; while they are certain that the promise of Christ is in every instance fulfilled to those who believe in him. The law of Christ tells them clearly "how they ought to walk and to please God." The spirit of Christ enables them to attain their end. He effectually purifies the sources and the motives of their conduct, by what the gospel calls "the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," and by means of "the faith in which they stand." He gives them help for every duty, and strength to combat every temptation. "He renews them to repentance" when they have fallen into a snare: and by his continued influence on their minds, or on the means of usefulness afforded them, or on the dispositions or situations of those who can either help or obstruct their fidelity, "he furnishes them thoroughly for every good work" within their sphere of duty.

It is impossible not to be sensible of the superior advantage of that morality, which can effectually persuade a faithful man that he possesses, by the spirit of Christ, a strength above his own, which is sufficient to qualify him for every duty, which is equal to every difficulty, and which must be superior to all temptations. He who truly believes this in his own case, will not soon be shaken in his resolution "to keep himself unspotted from the world." Depending on himself, he is often made sensible of his weakness. Relying on the promise of Christ, "he takes to himself the whole armour of God;" and "the God of hope fills him with all peace and joy in believing. "All things are thus made possible to him who believeth;" and he will not shrink from his duty when the day of trial comes.

We may safely appeal to every man's understanding; and to his deliberate reflections, whether the morality which is without religion, can bear to be compared with the law of Christ, as a rule of life, as a test of human character, as the standard of that which it is right for men either to do or to shun, or as an efficient guide of our

personal conduct. We may ask, besides, the most obstinate despisers of the doctrines of Christ, whether the faith which enforces such a morality, does not, in spite of the malignity of the world, "commend itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God?"

We ought to require nothing more to persuade us of the indispensable obligation of those who believe christianity, "to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for" the practical influence of "the faith of the gospel."

But that this part of the subject may be brought home to our private feelings, before I conclude, I beseech you to consider,

1. The indispensable obligation which lies on every one of us who sincerely believes the gospel, to cultivate earnestly in his own mind, and to maintain stedfastly in his personal conduct, the practical influence of "the faith of the gospel."

If we are not sanctified by means of the faith of Christ, "our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins." If we are not anxiously solicitous "to adorn" the faith we have embraced, by purity of life, by inviolable fidelity in our private du-

ties, by “the labour of love,” and by patience under suffering, we are destitute of that without which “our faith is dead ;” and every other object of our solicitude as religious men, is equally without advantage and without consolation.

According to the gospel, it is of equal importance to our condition in this world, and to the hope of eternal salvation at last, that it shall be the endeavour and solicitude of our lives, to make a constant, a visible, and a decided progress to the perfection to which we aspire, though we have not yet attained it, in godliness, in fidelity, in good works, and in patience. What a glorious ambition is excited among faithful men, when “they strive together with one spirit,” who shall best fulfil his personal duties ; who shall most effectually preserve himself from the pollutions of the world ; who shall be most in earnest to glorify God in his own place, or “to do good and to communicate” to those around him ; who shall best employ the talents entrusted to him, or most successfully add to them ten talents more ; who shall learn humility, or self-denial, or a disinterested spirit, with the most willing

mind; who shall be most in earnest “to watch and pray, that he enter not into temptation;” or, who shall be most solicitous, to give an impressive example to mankind, of the “faith which worketh by love,” and of the “faith which overcomes the world.”

They are happy indeed who are united in this spirit, “with one mind, striving together” for, what is certainly and substantially, the practical influence of “the faith of the gospel.”

Consider,

2. How much every one of us has it in his power to promote or to assist the practical influence of the gospel on those among whom he lives.

Let every individual man consider how much he can do in his own family; among those who are influenced by his advice, or interested by his affection, or allured by his example, or assisted by his labours, or enlightened by his knowledge, or profited by his wealth; or who may be warned or persuaded by his earnest admonitions.

It is not easy to represent by words, how

much faithful and conscientious men have done, in this department of substantial usefulness : and no man can calculate for himself, how far the grace of God might extend his usefulness, if, with good sense and prudence, he were earnestly and habitually to employ the opportunities which are given him, for the advantage or for the conversion of other men, or for their instruction, or for their edification “in the Lord.” If we use our best endeavours in our separate departments, or unite heartily with those who can assist us in this “work of the Lord,” “we strive together, in one spirit, and with one mind,” for the best interests of practical religion among the human race.

I entreat you to consider also,

3. The obligation which lies on faithful men, to shew to those who do not believe the gospel, “their work of faith and labour of love,” “with meekness and wisdom.”

Pure and exemplary morals are strong arguments indeed, for the “faith of the gospel.” We shall have most success in persuading those who do not believe, when we bring clearly into their view the practical effects of Christianity,

in promoting the best interests of mankind in this life, as well as in the life to come. We shall prove to their conviction, how superior the morality and the faith of Christianity are, to all the corrupt maxims of the world; if we can shew them from difficult or trying cases, how much purer, and how much more uniform the life of a Christian is than the conduct of those, who are either destitute of principle, or who are not in earnest in professing Christianity.

If good men were united, as they ought to be, in their endeavours to give this prominent and practical view of their religion, they would not often strive in vain for “the faith once delivered to the saints.” The controversy would no longer be maintained with regard to the morality of the gospel, or its salutary influence on human life; and the false morality of the world would not bear to be once mentioned, in comparison with the fidelity which is supported by “the sanctification of the spirit of Christ,” and the belief of the truth” revealed by him.

SERMON VI.

ON

THE RESULT OF GOOD AND OF BAD
AFFECTIONS.

ECCLESIASTES, ix. 6.

“ Their love and their hatred and their envy is now perished, neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.”

THIS text gives us a view of the lot of man, which ought to be as useful as it is humbling.

It is humbling to think, that the strongest affections which have perplexed, or agitated, or delighted us from our birth, will, in a few years, cease to have an existence on the earth; and that all the ardour which they have kindled, will be as completely extinguished and forgot-

ten, as if they had never been. "The wise and their works are in the hand of God, and no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them *."

But when we read this text, we ought to recollect, that though every thing in this world must be transitory, nothing can be uninteresting of which we shall find the effects or the result in the world to come. We see "the light of life" beyond the shades of death. Hatred and envy shall have their appointed end, when "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing." But a "new heaven and a new earth" rise up also before us, in which purity and love will predominate for ever.

We may certainly receive useful instruction from the general fact affirmed by this text, that with regard to the interests and affairs of this world, the best affections and the worst perish in the grave: especially if we extend our views to their final result in the kingdom of God.

* Eccles. ix. 1.

Solomon intended to represent opposite characters by contrary affections. We are at least entitled to make this supposition, from the distinction which he has stated at the beginning of this chapter, betwixt “the righteous and the wicked; betwixt the clean and the unclean; betwixt the good man and the sinner; betwixt him who sacrificeth, and him who sacrificeth not; betwixt him that sweareth, and him that feareth an oath*.”

I shall keep this idea in my view; and stating the contrary affections separately, shall endeavour to represent the instruction with regard to each of them, which we ought to receive from the doctrine of Solomon,

I. I begin with the description of good men, “Their love is perished.”

The different situations of human life will give us different views of this idea. Let us,

1. Apply it to parental love; for this is the first in the order of human affections.

If we have been the children of worthy and affectionate parents, who are now no more, the

* Eccles. xi. 2.

remembrance of their love can never cease to be interesting. We have pleasure in believing, that we have derived from them our best qualities, or that we can refer to them our success in life. We look back with a melancholy satisfaction on their anxieties for us when we had no care of ourselves ; on their solicitude to protect or to warn us ; on the affection with which they supplied our want of experience ; on the looks of kindness with which they gratified us ; on the instruction and the discipline by which they endeavoured to form us for the path of life ; on the fervent prayers by which they purified them ; on the earnestness with which they spake to us of duties and of godliness, when they admonished us of the evils to come, and strove to fortify, or instruct us, by “ the labour of love ;” on the sanguine hopes which they delighted to indulge, from the progress of our talents, or from our good conduct or success in the world, or from our duty and affection to them, or from our ardour in good works, or from our fidelity to the God of our fathers.

These are the most useful recollections of the human mind. It is the law of our nature,

that the parents go down to the grave, and leave their children behind them. But if we can remember our parents with those happy impressions of their affection and fidelity, we have that from them which will interest and admonish us as long as we live. If we have been faithful to the influence of parental love, it will never lose its hold of us.

Why should not each of us examine himself fairly on the subject ?

Has my conduct been at all worthy of the faithful discipline of my parents ; or of their earnest admonitions to guide and to bless my youth ; or of the last impressive prayer which came from “ the love which perished ” in the grave ?

Do I feel the influence still of parental solicitude, to restrain me in the hour of temptation ; or to revive on my conscience my early impressions of godliness and of good works ? Or, am I conscious that there is a motive to whatever is pure or estimable, ever returning to my thoughts, from the sense of my obligation to justify the hopes, and to be worthy of the examples, which are now no more ?

It is consolatory indeed, to be able to answer these questions to the satisfaction of our own minds. If we give thanks to Heaven that those "whose love has perished" died in faith and patience, and "commanded their children to keep the way of the Lord," we must feel that the impressions, to which these questions relate, are rivetted on our hearts; and that for the influence which they preserve on our conduct, we shall one day answer to God.

Ah! what shall those men do, who know that they deliberately trample on the memorials of parents who loved them in the fear of God? The love which lost its influence, before it could avail them, and of which they must feel themselves to have been unworthy, though it perished in the grave, shall rise up at "the judgment of the great day," to bear witness against them, "except they repent." The thought is deep and awful. If they have any tenderness of mind, and God hath not forsaken them, it will reach the bottom of their hearts.

But it is impossible not to feel how much the recollection of parental love, which recalls us

to prayer or to penitence, ought to suggest to other men with regard to the love which has not yet perished. Their parents admonish them still, and pray for them. Surely this is the time to consider how precious the impressions ought to be of God and of duties, which are produced by their earnest and affectionate endeavours to be faithful to God and to them. "My son, said Solomon, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee *."

On the other hand, they ought to know that the deliberate sacrifice of their first impressions to the vanities of their youth, or of their age, is equally unprincipled and irreparable. It is a perversion never to be forgotten, and which can seldom, indeed, be compensated.

But it is of great importance to remind those who are still permitted to enjoy the advantages

* Proverbs vi. 20, 21, 22.

of parental love, that their obligation to do their utmost to acknowledge and to repay them, is as urgent as it is indispensable. "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee †," is the first commandment with promise ‡. Those who feel the force of this obligation, know how much it is in their power to gladden, by their affectionate attentions, the parents who love them, and to render their last days happier than their first. They are conscious besides, that if there is any thing which ought to render a man unhappy all his life, it is the recollection of an undutiful, ungrateful, and unworthy conduct towards parents who had done every thing for him.

The season of filial duty is therefore as precious as it is honourable. But it passes so quickly away, that nothing can be more urgent in the mind of a good man, than the affectionate requital of parental love, which hastens to die; and which, before he is aware, will cease to have

† Exodus xx. 12.

‡ Ephes. vi. 2.

any more “ a place with any thing that is done under the sun.”

On this head I suggest besides, that, in contemplating the ends of parental love, the parents ought to feel their obligations as forcibly as the children.

If we consider, for what it is that our children will look back on us with respect ; for what they will cherish our memory with tenderness ; and what recollections of us will become precious to them ; we shall have the most irresistible conviction of the means by which we ought to demonstrate our love to them now, and our fidelity in parental duties.

On the other hand, if we ask ourselves deliberately, for what circumstances in our conduct our children may hereafter have reason to reproach us ; or what defects in our example, in our instructions, or in our parental discipline, may hereafter destroy their reverence for us, we shall find a motive to fidelity of the most forcible kind, equally supported by the feelings of parents, and by the faith of the gospel.

The time is not distant when all “our love shall perish.” But if we are faithful to God, and to our children, they will bless and consecrate our memory, when our heads are laid in the dust. Even their posterity may learn some good thing from them, which we have imparted; and that happy day at last may come, when we shall be able to say before the throne of God, “Behold us, and the children whom thou hast given us.”

This idea naturally directs us to apply the representation of the text,

2. To filial love.

The affection of children to their parents is a principle of our nature, not less important than parental love.

The son “who honours his father and mother,” and who cherishes for them, not only the reverence which he owes them, but the watchful solicitude of undissembled affection, repays an hundred fold their early anxieties for him. When he makes it the object of his life to promote their happiness, to prevent their wishes, or to help their infirmities; when his talents exceed their expectations, and his dispositions,

ripened by his progress into life, are still more interesting than his talents ; they delight to contemplate his success in the world, more than they have ever enjoyed their own : They regard the esteem which he acquires, with the honest and affectionate exultation of parental partiality : his dutiful affection to them is the resource and the consolation of their age : and the virtues which they ascribe to him, dwell on their thoughts, as often as they bless the God of their fathers.

When filial love is purified by the spirit of godliness, and the ardour of youth is controuled by the faith which “overcomes the world,” the affection of the children goes deeper still into the hearts the parents, and has a double effect to cheer the evening of their days. Every estimable quality is then added to good affections ; and the delight which the parents feel, from the continued expressions of filial love, is incorporated with every pure and joyful expectation. They look to their children with complacency, and with gratitude to God. They delight to dwell on their personal virtues, as blessings to themselves above all which they possess besides. They ex-

pect from their dutiful affection, their last consolations in this world. And in proportion to their firm reliance on "the hope of eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord," as they go down to the grave, they anticipate with delight and tenderness the happy time, when they shall see their children again, in the kingdom of "the everlasting Father."

There is not a source of human enjoyments purer in itself, or more inestimable in the progress of human life, than the affection which parents receive from their children, already advancing in the world; or the watchful solicitude of filial love, to add to their satisfactions, to relieve their anxieties, or to soften their decline.

The children, in the order of nature, survive their parents, and receive their parting blessing. But while we possess the satisfactions which we derive from our children, we are too apt to flatter ourselves, that this must be the fact in our own experience. We enjoy their society and their affection, as if they were certain resources which we are not destined to lose. We form our plans through life, for their advantage, after we "shall be gathered to our fathers." And we

allow ourselves to anticipate a long series of years, in which we imagine them to reflect honour on those who gave them birth, and to consecrate their memory.

Short-sighted mortals know not what is good for man ; and know still less, “ what a day may bring forth *.” Our children die before our eyes, and all “ their love perishes.” We follow them to the grave, at the moment when we have had most reliance on their affection ; and when they had given us the greatest reason to expect every thing from their talents or their virtues.

The good pleasure of God has made this heavy affliction not uncommon to men : But it brings with it the most impressive lesson which human life affords us, of the vanity of earthly things.

We toil and labour for our children ; we heap up wealth to be enjoyed by them : But when they die, all our schemes are ended ; every thing which we have done to render them rich or prosperous, is buried at once in their un-

* Proverbs xxvii. 1.

timely graves. We become solitary in the world, at the moment when we believed our prosperity at its height; and the wealth which we have accumulated for many years, we know not who shall scatter.

What a lesson is this against the love of the world! Against him “who vexes himself in vain!” Against “the vain shew,” and “the pride of life!” What a striking lesson is it to those, who think of nothing for their children, beyond the delights or the distinctions of mortality! How irresistible is our persuasion, when we see the children followed to their graves by their parents, that riches and prosperity are but secondary things, to the children of mortal creatures; that nothing can be ultimately precious to them, which extends not its effects beyond the grave; that virtues are beyond all computation superior to talents; the genuine faith of the gospel to every other source of ardour or activity; the well-founded hope of immortality and salvation by Jesus Christ, to every earthly expectation!

The death of the children of others suggests a striking admonition to those, whose children

are preserved to them. It warns them how they ought to estimate the expressions of filial love, while they are continued with them; how they ought to cherish them among their most precious blessings; how they ought to love their children, to assist their ardour, and to reward their duty; how much more solicitous they ought to be, “to lay up for them in store a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*,” than to secure to them the prosperity or the wealth of the world.

Finally, how precious is the filial love, which we continue to remember, rather with tenderness, than with regret! How infinitely precious, if we believe that our children are now with God; that they were taken from us, to be happy for ever; that “their love” has not “perished” for ever in the grave; that they will by and by be our companions again in a better world, when “the dead in Christ” shall rise to die no more; and that their affection for us, seven times purified, will last as the ages of the sons of God.

* J Tim. vi. 9.

We shall find instruction from the idea expressed in the text, by applying it,

3. To “the love which perishes” by the death of the intimate associates of our youth or of our age.

The pressure on the mind is severe indeed, when by the will of God we have lost the most faithful or the most affectionate of our associates; those of whom we had conceived the most delightful expectations; or those by whose means we had attained the most solid advantages for this world or for eternity. But their memorial is not lost—the memory of their virtues and of their intellectual endowments—the memory of their kindness—the memory of their usefulness to us—or the memory of the satisfactions which we have enjoyed with them.

There are imperfections which adhere to the best affections of the human mind. We are conscious of weaknesses in ourselves, and of defects in those whom we most esteem, which require a constant and a mutual forbearance; and which, to a certain extent, have a perpetual influence, to interrupt or to lessen the satisfactions, both of private and of domestic life.

But it is a most important fact, that in recollecting “the love which has perished,” all that was precious in it remains on our thoughts, and all its imperfections are buried in the grave. It is that alone which we valued and cherished, which we remember with tenderness, of those who are now no more. It is **their** good and estimable qualities alone, which consecrate their memorial within us, separated from all the infirmities which were once united to them.

This fact is important indeed : For it renders the memorials of love as useful as they are gratifying to those who preserve them. We remember that which was good : we forget every infirmity which was attached to it : we dwell with affection on every advantage and on every satisfaction which it yielded to us : and its living impression is rivetted on our hearts. We feel as if the image of the departed virtues, pure as the spirits of just men made perfect, were before us ; and we are still united to them by “the cords of love.”

These recollections, equally solemn and impressive, have a direct tendency both to comfort us in our sorrow over “those who are asleep,” and to purify our affections during the rest of our pilgri-

mage. We think of those “who walked with God;” and their memorial kindles our abhorrence of the pollutions of the world. While it awakens our ardour “to become followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” we think of the spirits departed, who were once our companions below, as we contemplate the angels of God descending to bless our recollections, and to watch our habitations.

It is precious to our hearts to be persuaded, that “the love which perished” in the grave, lives still with “the God of love and peace.” If we have “the faith which is the evidence of things not seen,” we follow by degrees to take our portion with “the dead in Christ.” The memorial which we cherish, is a pledge of our progress, and an anticipation of the glory “hereafter to be revealed in us.”

Shall it not instruct us in the mean time, with the most persuasive energy, how to use the love which remains to us; how to be faithful and affectionate to the associates whom God preserves to us; how to watch our personal infirmities; how to shield our private affections from their influence; how to bear with the in-

firmities of others ; how “ to keep ourselves unspotted from the world ? ”

A little time only can elapse, before all that we love shall perish, and we ourselves “ shall be gathered to our fathers.” But we know that the love which the spirit of Christ has sanctified to bless us in the house of our pilgrimage, liveth and abideth for ever. “ Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail ; whether there be tongues they shall cease ; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away—and now abideth these three—faith, hope, charity ; but the greatest of these is charity *.”

I have hitherto considered the idea in the text as applied to the affections of private life. But if “ love and hatred ” are here employed to represent either opposite or general characters, they must be extended beyond the limited situations of domestic life. With regard to love in particular, it may be affirmed with confidence, that till it goes far beyond these situations, it cannot be safely received as a test of human characters.

There may be a great display of private af-

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8. 13.

fections, where there is neither much principle nor much generosity of mind. We shall find men who are perpetually bringing before us their solitudes for their children, or for their personal associates, whose attention can scarcely be fixed, with any degree of earnestness, on the conditions or on the concerns of another human being; and in no instance, in which their private affections interfere. We shall find them anxious to display the sensibilities with which they are endowed, when they almost entirely confine them to situations, in which their personal satisfactions are involved.

This is selfishness, and is not love, whatever garb it may assume. "If ye love them who love you, said our Lord, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? and if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others *?"

The love which can be considered as representing the characters of the good and of the pure, is love divested of selfishness *." It is an affection, which even with regard to private duties, represses the ostentation and the selfish

gratifications of the mind ; and which embraces besides a far more extensive sphere of duty and of kindness.

I am therefore to consider the idea in this text as applied,

4. To the affections which are employed to promote the general interests and happiness of human life.

The dispositions which lead men to employ their talents for the advantage of their fellow-creatures, and to do them good offices heartily, without any hope of a requital, create one of the first distinctions, by which one man can be raised above another. If they are animated by the pure and chearful spirit of religion, they form the most interesting of human characters. The love which directs us by the sense of duty, where to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to assist the weak, to comfort the poor, or to revive the sorrowful ; the love which makes usefulness our happiness, and the help of every kind which we can bring to others our habitual solicitude ; is “ love out of a pure heart,” such as Christ requires and acknowledges.

When this affection becomes the habit of the mind, it always finds its objects readily ; and, without departing from its proper sphere, will always lead to the means of glorifying God. It extends to those who need advice or countenance, as well as to those who are destitute of food and raiment ; to those who require the aid of superior influence or superior talents, as well as to those who are pressed down by sorrow ; to the hidden retreats of ignorance and of misery, as well as to the opportunities of known and of public usefulness. The evil to be redressed, and the good to be done in any condition, will lie upon the mind of a good man, as the appointed channel of his personal duty to God and to men. “ Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, said Solomon, do it with thy might ; for there is neither work, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave, whither thou goest *.” “ Do it heartily, said an apostle, as to the Lord, and not to men †.”

The usefulness of men who live under these impressions, and who follow them out steadily and earnestly through life, goes far beyond its

* Eccles. ix. 10.

† Col. iii. 23.

natural or immediate sphere ; by means of those whom they comfort or assist ; and even beyond the limits of their own lives. But every thing has its destined period, which depends on the breath of man. The most useful life is spent, before we are aware, and all the kindness which animated its progress, perishes in the dust.

The selfish man dies, and we think no more of him ; or we think of him with more compassion than regret ; or we remember the artful guise which his selfishness could put on, and have nothing better to remember ; or we think of those who fill up his place, and who cannot be less useful in the world than he has been.

But “the love which seeketh not her own” perisheth not “as a fool dieth.” It leaves an impressive and a permanent memorial. When it is departing, we feel as if a dark cloud had risen around us, and “we fear as we enter into the cloud.” We think with emotion of the short-lived labours of the most faithful men, and of the pressure of calamities on the world, when “they are gathered to their fathers :” “They

who had so great a share in all that was worthy or respectable around them—They whose hand was found in every thing, useful or pleasing to their fellow-creatures.

It is most consolatory to know that such men have lived, and that they lived not in vain ; that they lived, not for themselves, but for the glory of God ; that they lived till their probation was complete, and that their “ works do follow them * ;” that they could finish but the first stage of their existence among mortals ; but that their spirits, now with God, in a state of more animated existence than ever, could they communicate with us still, would say to us, in our tabernacles below, “ Ye have fully known our manner of life, our purpose, our faith, our charity, and patience † ;” “ Be ye followers of us and of the Lord ‡ ;” “ The time is short ;” and “ the fashion of the world passeth away § .”

They have left us an impressive lesson, if it reaches our hearts. “ We would not have you ignorant, said an apostle, concerning them who are

* Rev. xiv. 13.

† 2 Tim. iii. 10.

‡ 1 Thess. i. 6.

§ Cor. vii. 29.

asleep, that ye sorrow not as those who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him :*” “ For God is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love ; and we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end ; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. †”

The infirmities which adhere to the present life are not to be separated, in the best of us, from human virtues. But the good affections which predominate, are recorded in heaven. And if we shall “ have our portion with those who have been faithful unto death,” the result of our labours will also be for a memorial ; and it will be counted to us in our place “ at the day of Christ.”

I have thus represented the idea of the text as applied to the good affections of private life, and to the general kindness of men to men. They perish in the grave ; but they leave their effects

* 1 Thes. iv. 13, 14.

† Heb. vi. 10, 11, 12.

and their memorials on the earth ; and they will at last revive, to be perfected in the kingdom of God.

I am now to consider,

II. That the malignant affections produce as real effects on the affairs of this life, as those which tend to promote human happiness ; and that after all the disorders and miseries which result from them, they also perish in the grave, as if they had never been. “ The hatred of the wicked, said Solomon, and their envy are perished ; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.”

It is the character which the gospel gives us of men destitute of principle, that “ they live in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another *.” No description can be more exact of the condition of those, who follow blindly the impulse of their worst passions, and who have neither principles nor affections to restrain them ; who pursue their own gratifications, in defiance of every moral and religious obligation ; who look with a malignant or a jealous eye, on eve-

* Titus iii. 3.

ry man whom they think happier or more successful than themselves ; who regard with indignation or disdain whatever resists and whatever reproaches them ; who scruple to commit no injury which can serve their purpose ; who hate with bitterness, and who never forgive.

If there is not something good, there is at least something which is comparatively less malignant, which mixes with the worst of human passions : and there is perhaps no character which is in every aspect and in every point equally depraved. But when the inveterate passions of hatred and envy predominate in those who live together, there is seldom to be found much to balance or compensate them. They misinterpret, they reproach, they revile one another. Viewing every thing with regard to one another in its worst aspect, to gratify their malice or revenge they will not only trample on every principle of duty, but they will sacrifice to them even their own interests or their personal comfort ; and in some instances even sources of private enjoyment which nothing else would persuade them to relinquish.

The most malignant spirits are restrained by the condition of human life : the most inve-

terate hatred is overawed by the manners and by the laws which are established: and there are limits beyond which the worst passions can seldom go, in the present state of the world.

There are many degrees of hatred and envy. They are mixed with many different motives and impressions. There are the shades of bad passions, which are sometimes seen to unite even with good affections; and good men themselves are on some occasions tempted to commit injuries, or are betrayed into the envy or malignity of the world.

These facts must not be forgotten. They are facts which ought to admonish the best of us to guard our tempers, and “to keep our hearts with all diligence* :” facts, which teach us, in the most impressive form, how we ought “to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation †.” The least portion of envy or hatred corrupts and perverts whatsoever it approaches; and he who shall but for a moment deliberately allow himself to hate his brother in his heart, knows not

* Proverbs iv. 23.

† Matth. xxvi. 41.

how far, or how fatally, his passions may pervert him.

But Solomon intended, by “the hatred and envy” of this text, to describe the *bad* characters as distinguished from the *good*; and therefore to represent those malignant passions as predominating. He describes by them, not the infirmities, or even the great transgressions, into which men of real worth are sometimes betrayed; but the strong and inveterate passions of those who have neither principle nor morals; passions, which, though they may in some instances be restrained by the manners of the world, or by the accidental interests or contrary passions of those whom they agitate, maintain their empire as the ruling or habitual passions of the heart, in defiance of all the authority of duty and religion.

What dreadful havoc have they made on the state of the world? Why is this man torn from his friend, or made wretched in his family? driven from his home, or blasted in his fame? It was the hatred of his neighbour which plunged him in misery; and his inexorable malignity which pursued him. He lost the esteem of his

friend, by the insidious falsehood of an enemy. He lost his peace at home, by the strifes which an enemy prepared for him ; and by wrongs which admitted of no reparation. An enemy envied his prosperity, and destroyed it ; and, to complete the injury, defamed his character, and was believed.

Why is another man persecuted by a succession of calamities, apparently unconnected and remote ? It is inveterate malignity which creates him an enemy on every side ; and which rears a serpent's head from every thicket.

From whence come the strifes or turbulence either of public or of private life ? From the malignity of single men, irritating the passions and aggravating the contentions of those around them, The miseries inflicted by means of hatred and envy, no form of words can sufficiently describe. Their effects to destroy every good affection ; to pervert men's conduct with regard to every human interest ; to pollute every source of human satisfaction ; and to agitate every dwelling of human beings which they are permitted to enter ; comes minutely home to our deliberate convic-

tion, and more or less to every man's feelings and experience.

But the miseries which bad passions create in the minds of those in whom they predominate, are beyond all the other miseries of the human race. The most successful malignity is inexpressible anguish within the breast of him from whom it comes. Its victims, wretched as they may be made by his means, are happy when compared with himself. He cannot but be conscious of the unworthiness of his conduct; and though he steadily resists the reproaches of his conscience, the inveteracy of his own passions tears his heart asunder, and leaves him equally without a comforter, and without a consolation.

But follow hatred and envy to the period to which Solomon directs us: follow them to the time when the malignant being is levelled with the dead, and when all his turbulence and strifes are buried in his grave; when his contentions and his passions have ceased for ever; and when he can have no more any influence on the state of human life. That moment, with regard to the survivors, is like the calm which follows the

horrible tempest, “when the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.” “Hatred and envy have perished,” and the world is in peace. The multitude will forget their sufferings, and the drooping heart will find its consolation, when the malignant spirit is heard no more. The strifes, the injuries, and the resentments, by which so many have been agitated, and from which so many can date their miseries, lose themselves in the tomb, which incloses for ever the hatred which created them.

Some of the effects of hatred and envy may certainly last, after their authors are crumbled into dust; and an awful consideration this must be, to men who think and feel. But it is ever a consolation to the world, that “hatred and envy have perished,” whatever may survive them. Another malignant being may arise, and claim his interest in the strifes which were before him; and it may well humble in the dust the most unprincipled man, as he approaches to death, to imagine that by his obstinate perversity he has contributed to perpetuate such a curse upon the earth: for hatred and envy can have no memorial, but as the image of the infernal spirits, or

as the scourge by which they are permitted to aggravate the miseries of the human race.

But we must follow hatred and envy farther still, to know their result and end. A wicked man dies at the appointed time: but his spirit does not die. Alas! his place is ready. "Tophet is ordained of old *;" the place in which malignant spirits are to dwell for ever. Hatred, and strife, and envy are there; "the worm which dieth not †," the hatred and "the fire which are not quenched ‡." All the apostate spirits are there together; abhorred, and abhorring one another; blaspheming the God of heaven, and conscious that they are not to be separated for ever.

If this description is founded in truth, the result of malignity is certain as the unchangeableness of God. Ought it not to make a deep impression on our consciences, and to compel us to pray? "Father of our spirits, suffer us not to be tempted above what we are able to bear: help us to govern our spirits, and to purify them: help us "to fly from the wrath to come."

* Isaiah xxx. 33.

† Mark-xi. 44.

‡ Mark xi. 46.

Ought it not to reach the hearts of those who are agitated or governed by hatred and envy, in demonstration of the spirit, and of power? The result of all their malignity falls at last on themselves; and “except they repent,” seals their everlasting doom with the worst of the wicked.

If we regard the substantial or permanent happiness of our natures, either in this world, or in the world to come, we shall fly from the strifes around us, as the greatest and the worst of evils. We shall tremble at the thought of hatred, which takes away the heart. We shall pray and watch without ceasing, that amidst all the infirmities of our fallen nature, this “sin may not lie upon us.”

It is love, and love to which no hatred is conjoined, from which alone even our present satisfactions are derived. Why, said an envious spirit, to a happy family; a family who laboured to give happiness to those who hated them; why are ye so happy, and am I so wretched; ye who have so much less prosperity than I possess? We are happy, they replied, not from any unusual prosperity in our lot, but be-

cause we have no hatred, or envy, to agitate our minds, or to pollute our satisfactions.

“I say unto you, said our Lord, love your enemies; bless them who curse you, do good to them who hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your father who is in heaven*.”

Wherefore, my brethren, suffer this word of exhortation; for this is the law, and the gospel.

* Matth. v. 44, 45.

SERMON VII.

ON

THE INHERITANCE OF A GOOD MAN'S CHILDREN.

PROVERBS xiii. 22.

A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children.*

IT is an interesting and indisputable truth, that the happiness of men depends less on their external conditions than on their personal virtues. "A good man is satisfied from himself;" and

* This sermon was preached before the society incorporated by royal charter, for the benefit of the sons of the clergy of the church of Scotland, May 29. 1792.

The coincidence of the illustrations contained in it with the subject of the preceding Sermon will be obvious to every reader; but did not appear to the author to be a sufficient reason, to prevent its republication in the present volume. If it shall contribute to attract the attention of any individual to the institution which gave occasion to its first publication, he will not think it has been improperly inserted; and allows himself to believe, that his readers will consider it rather as a continuation of the subject of the preceding sermon, than as a repetition of the sentiments which it contains.

peace of conscience and trust in God are more precious blessings than all the wealth of the world.

This is the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven to bless mankind and to save them. “Blessed are the poor in spirit—blessed are they that mourn—blessed are the meek—blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness—blessed are the merciful—blessed are the pure in heart—blessed are the peace-makers—blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake*.” He represents the characters of good men, by the virtues or dispositions which distinguish them in different situations; and pronounces them “blessed” in all the conditions of human life. “The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost †.”

But besides the personal happiness which a good man enjoys, this text affirms that the effects of his habits are transmitted to his children, and even to their descendants. Though he has neither wealth nor rank to convey them,

* Math. v. 1—10.

† Rom. xiv. 17.

they derive from his character a sufficient and a permanent inheritance. Solomon refers chiefly to the prosperity of this life: and contrasting the advantages which "a good man leaves to his children's children," with the uncertain tenure of riches possessed without principle or morals, he affirms, that "the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just *." The providence of God smiles on the industry and virtue of a good man's children, and leads them on to prosperity and wealth; while the families of unprincipled men, entering into life without the advantages of early culture, are too frequently degraded by their misconduct from the condition which they have inherited from their fathers.

I shall first consider the doctrine of the text, and then the practical conclusions which it suggests to us.

I. The instruction of a good man is an inheritance to his children.

Our happiness, and even our prosperity in the world, depend more on the culture of our youth than on all the external advantages which

* Prov. xiii. 22.

can belong to our conditions. The habits which a young man acquires under his father's eye, are the foundations of his character. He who has trained his son "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," to godliness, and truth, and justice, and fidelity; who has taught him to restrain his temper, and to govern his tongue; to subject his interest to his duty, his passions to his conscience, his inclinations to his understanding; leaves him in possession of the most permanent advantages of human life. Whatever his condition may be, he has the means of prosperity in his hands; and the most certain sources of satisfaction in the enjoyment of whatever he acquires. Even talents are subordinate to virtues; and good affections are of more importance in human life than the most splendid ornaments of an unprincipled mind.

It is not in every man's power to add to the habits on which the religious and moral character depends, the principles of liberal knowledge, and the views of a liberal mind. But he who has done this, sends his children into the world with those precious endowments, without which the wealth of the rich serves only to render

them more conspicuously contemptible or unhappy.

Men of the same worth are not equally qualified, for the duties of parental tuition, and their children have not the same advantages. But there is a minuteness and an affection in the paternal care of a good man, which supplies the want of many talents ; an earnestness and a purity of design, which is consecrated in the minds of his children, and leaves indelible impressions. They venerate his intentions, even where his judgment has failed him. They look back on his solicitude and on his faithful admonitions, with an affection and reverence which the succession of years does not destroy. In their struggles betwixt principle and temptations, they hear his voice from the tomb ; and if they persist in the path of duty, or are successful in the pursuits of life, it is their pride and their consolation, that they reap the fruits of his paternal labours and of his last instructions.

II. The example of a good man is an inheritance to his children.

The character of a father lies at the foundation of his influence, and the effect of his pater-

nal solitudes depends on it. His habits are his most successful admonitions; and the examples of religion and probity which his children receive from the general tenor of his temper and conduct, are his most permanent instructions. He who has gone before his children in the path of duty, and has shewn them in his own conduct the effects of godliness and of integrity in practice, leaves on their minds impressions of his character, which remain with them through life, and which interest and determine them in the most trying situations. If he has convinced them that he derives his motives and his consolations from the sincerity of his faith; that he allows no competition to be in his mind betwixt the praise of men, and the approbation of God; betwixt "the wages of iniquity," and "the testimony of a good conscience;" betwixt the considerations of selfishness, or the pride of life, and the opportunities of being useful to other men, or the "labour of love," and of good works; betwixt the utmost gratifications of pleasure or ambition, and the substantial satisfactions which arise from purity of mind: if he has given these impressions of his character to

his children, his example does more to determine their habits than his best instructions.— They remember him with tenderness and awe, when sinners entice them : They think of him with an honourable pride, when their conduct is worthy of his character and of his hopes : When his head is laid in the dust, they cherish his memory, to stimulate and to guide them in the path of duty : And after they have been long accustomed to think and to act for themselves, they trace back to the effects of his example both their prosperity and their virtues.

Even those who have lost their fathers before they could reap the benefit of their example, hear of their virtues with a generous ardour, as precious memorials transmitted to them, which ought to influence their conduct, and from which they derive a personal distinction. The living example given by a good man to a dutiful son, furnishes him with practical lessons to enforce the instructions of his youth, to teach him the application of principle to conduct, and to form both his views of life and his habits of acting. They are sealed on his heart by his filial affection, and he cherishes the remembrance of

them as the foundations of his character. Even a degenerate son feels the awe of his father's virtues. They operate early as a restraint, and have more influence than is always seen. Sometimes, too, by the grace of God, they operate at a later period, to convince him, when he has been perverted, how far and how fatally he has erred.

There are certainly defects in all human characters, which render our best examples to our children very imperfect; and errors, adopted in practice, must be admitted to have more pernicious consequences, than the worst defects of general instruction. But it will be observed, that the habitual errors of a good man are not vices, and that defects or infirmities prevent not the influence of substantial virtues. It is of more importance to add, that it is agreeable to the laws of Nature and Providence, or is a consequence of their influence, that the defects of a father should be separated in the minds of his children from his better qualities. They do not allow themselves to dwell on his infirmities, though they are not ignorant of them; and from the habits of filial love, they lose the recollection of

them. But their imaginations and their affections consecrate the memory of his virtues.

The best advantages may undoubtedly be lost ; and success in life is not always the effect of the most probable means of attaining it. There are exceptions to the influence of every general cause of prosperity which can be mentioned, arising from the perversion of individuals, or from the wise and unalterable arrangements of Providence. But it is certain, on the other hand, that the characters which are formed by the faithful instruction and pure examples of good men, are accompanied with advantages to those who possess them, both for the duties and for the happiness of active life, which nothing else, which they inherit from their fathers, can confer on them. Virtue and probity, cultivated into confirmed habits, if there are any talents united to them, are the best securities for the fidelity, the industry, the reputation, and the success, which place men in prosperous conditions. Every wise man regards them as solid and permanent advantages, and labours to transmit them to his children ; and even unprincipled men feel their importance, though their person-

al characters deprive them of the means of conveying them.

III. The care and protection of Providence are an inheritance to a good man's children.

A good man will neglect none of the means which his situation affords him, to qualify his children for the business and the duties of life, and to promote their prosperity in the world. But while he uses his utmost endeavours for their advantage, his chief dependance is on Providence. He commits his children to God. He expects from him the protection and prosperity, of which no human foresight can assure them. This is a certain and perpetual resource. His paternal labours are sanctified by prayer. The solitudes of a father give place to the faith of a Christian. He relies on the records of inspiration, illustrated by the experience of all the ages; and commends his children to the God of his fathers, assured of his faithful promise: "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive*." The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children †.

* Jerem. xlix. 11. † Ps. ciii. 17.

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up *. I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread †." The prayer of paternal love is not warranted or encouraged in vain by these indelible records: "The promise is to us and to our children;" and the children of the faithful are holy as the heritage of the Lord. The prayers of a devout man, purified by faith and by good works, are remembered before God, for the children whom he has given him.

It is a law of Providence, which was incorporated with the first written law delivered to the world, that God "shews mercy to thousands of them that love him," and to their children after them; and we have good reason from experience to believe, that for the sake of faithful men he has compassion even on the wicked and the hardened. This law is written on the hearts of the people, so as to render them conscious of the claims of a good man's family when their condition is understood, and to interest in their

* Ps. xxvii. 10.

† Ps. xxxvii. 25.

prosperity even those to whom they are not known.

The testimony of ages shews that this law has its full effect, and warrants the confidence with which devout men commit their children to God. The history of human life is the record of Providence; and it is not the least interesting volume of this record, which contains the events by which Providence has raised up the children of the faithful beyond all the hopes of their fathers.

One man sends forth his children into the world without wealth and without friends, with no advantages but the instruction he has given them, and his blessing, and his prayers: and the hand of the Lord is with them; and they prosper in their honourable labours; and they gain the esteem and confidence of strangers; and God raises up a friend when they need his help; and the course of unforeseen events opens to them a succession of new resources; and they reach a condition to which they were not born; and they return with wealth and honour into the bosom of their father's house; and he lives still, to give thanks to the God of his fathers; and his latter days are happier than his first.

Another man has only lived to embrace his children, and to commend them to God. They are helpless infants, cast on the care of Providence; but they are chosen to be eminent examples of the faithfulness of God. He raises up men of different views and characters to fulfil to them the duties of a father. By their means they enjoy more liberal advantages than their parents could have given them; and even the circumstance which has deprived them of the benefits of paternal care, is used by Providence to assure them of the means of prosperity. They become more the objects of attention, than they would have been in their original situation. They enjoy opportunities of exertion and success, from which a more prosperous beginning would have naturally excluded them. If they experience the help of their father's friends, they are as often indebted to the kindness of a stranger. They are able at last to bring forward one another, and to be useful to other men. And they remember together, with affection and reverence, the virtues and the prayers of a father, which Providence has consecrated as "an inheritance" to them.

The conduct of Providence in similar cases, is too much diversified to be represented in detail. But if we shall look into the various departments of human life, and consider by whom they are occupied ; if we shall recollect the history of the worthy, the active, the prosperous, the opulent men ; we shall find that no small proportion of them have been the children of Providence. We shall see among them men who have derived nothing from their fathers but the effects of paternal virtues ; men who have been brought forward by the help to which they were conscious of no claim, and of which they had no natural expectation ; men who have been indebted to events which are denominated the accidents of life, which, though unforeseen by men, are the decrees of God ; men who have found patronage and protection where they least expected them, and at the most critical seasons, and whose success has exceeded all their computations ; men who look back with complacency on the humble sphere in which their fathers served God, “ in the labour of love” and of good works, and who have the pure satisfaction of believing, that “ their prayers and

their alms have come up before God, as a memorial *” for them.

We do not always acknowledge the agency of Providence in the events of which we can trace the second causes, and we enjoy our prosperity without reflecting on the source of it. But the influence of God on the circumstances which regulate our lot, is real and perpetual, amidst all the irreligion and incredulity of the world. Though we do not reverence the hand that guides us, “he is faithful who hath promised †;” and “though we believe not, he abideth faithful ‡.”

The plan of Providence is not so uniform, as to render it certain that the children of good men will be always prosperous. The general laws which influence human affairs are not suspended for the benefit of individuals; and their own misconduct often determines their conditions. The children often suffer from the improper management of their early education, originating not from the intentions, but from the

* Acts x. 4.

† Heb. x. 23.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 13.

mistakes of their parents. The moral discipline, too, which they require, and the purposes which Providence has chosen them to accomplish, are often inconsistent with the prosperity which they do not attain.

But with all these exceptions, of which we can easily perceive the extent, there is a sufficient number of facts, established by the experience of many generations, and obvious to the attention of every devout mind, to illustrate the general doctrine, that the children of a good man are objects of the peculiar care and protection of Heaven; that while he uses his best endeavours to promote their prosperity, he is justified by experience in the confidence with which he resigns their lot to God; that Providence is to him a resource of which no situation can deprive him, and is the chief inheritance of his children.

We can see the families of unprincipled men suffering the consequences of their depravity, and by the course of events, as well as by their own misconduct, falling from the condition in which their fathers had placed them. The providence of God scatters the accumulations of ava-

rice and violence, and, according to the language of the mosaical law, “ visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations *.” But the effects of virtue and probity are permanent ; and, amidst all the variety of pursuits and conditions which distinguish the children of good men in this world, they reap the blessing of their fathers after many days. I add,

IV. That the kindness of faithful men is an inheritance to a good man's children.

With all the advantages with which a father can send his children into the world, their success must in a great measure depend on the assistance and the friendship of other men ; and the purposes of Providence in their favour are accomplished, by means of those whom God raises up to assist, or to guide them. But the hearts of men, as well as the course of events, are in the hands of God ; and he selects the instruments of his purpose from all the variety of human characters. The selfish, the envious, the deceitful, the profligate, are subservient to him ;

* Exod. xx. 5,

and furnish (often indeed from bad motives, and as often without intending it), both the occasions and the means, by which the children of Providence reap the inheritance of their fathers. But the kindness of men who are themselves guided by principle, to the children of those who were faithful while they lived, is a department of duties which belong to their proper characters, and which are enforced by the spirit and by the laws of religion. This is one of the most interesting forms in which one good man can meet the affections of another, or acknowledge the relation which unites them. The protection given to the children, is more than friendship to their father. It is the disinterested homage due to purity of principle and to good works, or it is the active testimony of an upright mind to the memory of departed virtues. "Whosoever," said our Lord, "shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" The satisfaction of contributing, from a sense of duty, to repay to the children the godly sincerity of the father, and his con-

* Matth. xii. 50.

tentment, and his “labour of love,” is a pledge to a man himself that his own mind is pure. It is love to a disciple, “because he belongs to Christ †.” It is the “charity, which is the end of the commandment, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned*.” We owe the offices of humanity to men of all characters and kindreds, as the children of that God “who hath made of one blood all the nations of men;” and the spirit of active benevolence which Christianity has spread among the nations, and which has at least as much energy among the men of the present time, as it had in any former age, is a permanent barrier raised up by the Son of God, for the protection of the helpless and the orphan, in all the situations of human life. But the benevolent attentions which we owe to the families of good men, besides the obligations they derive from the considerations of humanity, are enforced by Christianity (like every thing else which belongs to “the love of the brethren”) as the test of vital religion in ourselves; as the pledge of our union to “the

† Mark ix. 41.

* 1 Tim. i. 5.

household of faith," and of our relation and fidelity to Him "who is the head over all things to the church," and "who gathers together in one the children of God." "We know," says the apostle John, "that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren *;" and "inasmuch," says our Lord, "as ye have done" a kindness "to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me †." It is an idea which has a peculiar energy in the mind of a man whom "the love of Christ constrains," and whom the law of Christ determines, that his affection to the children shall be a pledge of his union to their father in "the household of God," and of his relation to their Master and his. Our children are more precious to us than all the prosperity of human life; and it must be strong consolation to a father's heart, to believe that a memorial for his family is written on the conscience of every man "who loves our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." To the children, it is an inheritance "better than the riches of many wicked," on which they have a right to re-

* 1 John iii. 14.

† Matth. xxv. 40.

ly, in proportion to the progress of practical Christianity among men, and to the power of the doctrines of Christ over the minds of the faithful.

The obligations which I have represented are indisputable. And though, from the imperfection of human virtues, and our imperfect knowledge of one another, the effects of our attention to the children of good men may not be as extensive as they ought to be, I trust and believe, by the gospel of Christ, that when "the redeemed of the Lord shall be gathered," and the fathers, and the children, and the benefactors, shall be assembled together, this branch of fidelity shall not be found the least in the kingdom of God. With the best intentions, our judgment may mislead us; but that which is "done to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall in no case lose its reward."

"A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's *children*." If the doctrine of this text has been in any degree illustrated, it is easy to see, how the inheritance of the sons becomes the portion of their children. The same

general characters, as well as the effects of the prosperity of individuals, are transmitted through many generations. Every man must have observed, that the dispositions of the ancestor are found in his descendants; and that a man who perseveres in the habits to which his fathers have formed him, teaches them successfully to his children after him. It is not less obvious, that the virtues of a family will often prevail against the vices of an individual. They will save him from the degradation which his misconduct has deserved, and they will rescue his children from the effects of his example. The prosperity of many families is known to be preserved through successive generations, long after they have lost the virtues of their ancestors; and though there are many other rules by which the wisdom of God determines the lot of men, a devout man will often find reasons for believing, that the indulgence of Providence, continued to unworthy individuals, is to be traced to the memory of those who were before them, and to the covenant of the Lord in behalf of their descendants.

It is one of the most forcible considerations

which can animate the efforts of a benevolent mind, that the small but faithful offices of kindness done to the child of a good man, may, by God's providence, and according to his faithful promise, become the means of transmitting virtue and prosperity through successive generations.

I have said all that I proposed on the doctrine of the text. Let us now attend to the practical conclusions which it suggests to us. The extent of the subject is beyond the limits of one discourse; and I must confine myself to the most obvious remarks, without attempting to pursue them.

1. The doctrine suggests to every father, his indispensable obligation to give to his children the inheritance of the faithful.

Their happiness and prosperity depend more on his personal habits, than on all his industry and wealth. The unprincipled manners of a father deprive his children, not only of the best advantages of paternal love, but of the substantial effects of paternal virtues. Their consequences to himself reach from this life to the life that never ends; and their pernicious influence on the

character and condition of his family, may be extended through distant generations. On the other hand, the tenderness of parental affection adds the most animating considerations to the obligations of our faith, and of our moral duties. The most important interests of our children depend on the habits and dispositions, which they shall derive from us. If we shall be faithful to God and to them, we may live to enjoy their virtues and their prosperity ; or if Providence shall deny us this satisfaction, we shall at least die in peace, leaving them with confidence to the God of their fathers ; and our names will be remembered with esteem and honour among their descendants.

2. The doctrine should teach the children of good men, with how much anxiety they ought to preserve the moral and religious advantages which they have received from their fathers.

It is their indispensable duty to maintain the character of their father's house, that their posterity may inherit the blessing, which has come down to them ; to possess, with gratitude to God, the prosperity which he has given them

for the sake of their fathers ; to give examples of godliness, of fidelity, and of good works, worthy of the race of which they are descended ; and that the name and the inheritance of their fathers may be permanent, as “ he is faithful who hath promised,” “ to command their children, and their household after them, to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement.” There are no advantages which may not be abused and forfeited ; and the perversion of the children of faithful men, while they enjoy the effects of the virtues of their ancestors, has peculiar aggravations. I add,

3. That the doctrine ought to satisfy every conscientious man, of his personal obligations to contribute to the utmost of his power, to ensure to the children of good men the inheritance bequeathed to them by their fathers.

It is by means of the services and of the help which men receive from one another, that the designs of Providence are accomplished ; And when we embrace, with simplicity of heart, the opportunities which are within our sphere, to guide the industry or to assist the exertions of a good man's family, we fulfil an important branch

of our personal duties, and are “fellow-workers together with God.” Our usefulness is not limited by the particular advantages which individuals derive from us, but extends to the distant consequences of their virtue and prosperity in the world.

Every man can discern the opportunities of being useful in this department of duty, which arise out of his own situation; and how far he ought in every instance to embrace them, must be left to his understanding and his conscience. No man's condition allows him to do all the good which might be done, or to give all the help which the families of worthy men require. It is an object, as much of duty as of prudence, to select the cases, in which our endeavours will be most productive, and in which the means we possess will be most effectual to fill up our portion of “the labour of love.”

It is obvious, that those who have been deprived of their parents in their infancy, and who have been cast on the care of Providence, without culture and without wealth, have peculiar claims on our beneficence. Their helpless condition, added to their father's prayers and alms,

are irresistible arguments with a faithful and benevolent mind.

But a father, from whom his children receive the benefit both of instruction and example, is often prevented, by his want of wealth, from bestowing on them those liberal advantages, which are suited to their talents, and to the rank which he holds in society. In this case, much good may be done at a little expence, by the wise and affectionate counsel of those, who are more conversant than himself in the business of the world; or by their patronage, or by a small assistance given at a proper season, and in a form suited to his condition.

Though those who enjoy prosperity, and have no families to share it, can do more than others, the circumstances of human life allow few individuals to take on themselves the charge of other men's children. But the united exertions of benevolent men can accomplish ends, to which their separate endeavours are unequal. Public institutions, for the purpose of ensuring to the young, the inheritance which they derive from their fathers, collect into one channel the counsels and beneficence of individuals,

whose means of usefulness in this department are too limited, to produce any considerable effects in private life. The poor widow casts in her mite, with the rich who make an offering to purify their wealth. The silent beneficence which shuns the light, is added to the effects of public liberality, without departing from the path of "alms which are done in secret." And rich men who die, conscious that during the course of their prosperity, they have neglected the good works which they might have done, can leave an offering behind them, worthy of their last impressions, to help the unhappy and the fatherless in the world.

I do not pretend to give a full enumeration of cases, which every man's understanding and his heart may suggest to him. I have made these observations, because they coincide precisely with the objects of the benevolent institution, which gives occasion to this annual meeting.

"The Society for the benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the established Church of Scotland," was instituted at Edinburgh in the beginning of February 1790. Its general object is, to form a permanent fund, by means of sub-

scriptions, donations, bequests, or contributions, the annual revenue of which, shall be applied to assist the sons of ministers of the established church of Scotland, in acquiring the education which is suited to the rank which their fathers hold in the country, and those professional qualifications which are necessary to bring them forward into active employments. The advantages of the institution are to be extended, without limitation, to every district of the kingdom, and to young men intended for any active profession. No distinctions can be made, but such as are necessary, in discriminating the circumstances of those who expect the aid of the Society, and in the impartial selection of cases, in which the greatest good can be done at the least expence. Other advantages, besides pecuniary aid, may be expected from the united endeavours of the respectable men whom this institution has associated, who have no other object than to be useful to the children of ministers; and who pledge themselves to the public, to embrace every opportunity to assist their talents, and to promote their success in life. The benefits which individuals derive from the institution, will not be

confined to themselves, but in their consequences will reach every member of their father's families, whom their prosperity or their exertions can assist.

The Society have confined their first attention to the sons of the clergy. But they have reserved power to themselves, when the increase of their capital shall render it prudent, to extend a similar assistance to the *daughters* of ministers, to enable them also to acquire the advantages arising from useful employments.

They have the best reasons to be assured, that the general design has received the approbation of the public. From the first day of the institution, two years ago, their funds have been gradually increasing. A very considerable addition has been made to them, since the last annual meeting: And since that period, too, his Majesty has been pleased to grant his royal charter, constituting the Society a legal corporation; which, besides the authority which it gives to the institution, intitles them to hold property in the country, and to receive legacies, bequests, and donations, according to the benevolence of the public.

It has been an object of their utmost atten-

tion to secure the purity of management, and the faithful and impartial application of the funds of the Society ; and they persuade themselves, that the precautions which have been taken, will not be ineffectual. They trust in the providence of God, that the objects, which they have in view, will be secured by their perseverance, and by the continued favour of the public ; and they have the greatest encouragement, in observing the many prosperous institutions of benevolence around them, which have risen, from small beginnings, into useful and permanent establishments.

I think it unnecessary to say more. Every thing else, which belongs to the subject, will be found in the printed accounts of the Society.

The livings of the clergy of this church are known to be inadequate, both to the condition of the country, and to the importance of their rank and office among their fellow-citizens. No body of men, consisting of the same number, have better supported their reputation for purity of morals, or faithful labours, for liberal knowledge, or public usefulness, or for private and domestic virtues : and I am persuaded I speak

both to your understandings and to your affections, when I add, that, from the general character which they must be allowed to possess, their children are well entitled, among their brethren, to reap the inheritance of the faithful.

Now, may the Lord God of heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ, “the great Shepherd of the flock,” bless and prosper this institution, for the sake of our brethren, and of the children who are born to them, and of many generations after we shall be gathered to our fathers.

SERMON VIII.

ON

THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE.

ROMANS V. 20.

—“*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.*”

THERE is in this chapter a striking description of the original fall of man, and of our final restoration. The effect of Adam's disobedience to entail guilt and misery on his descendants, is stated in opposition to the efficacy of the great redemption, accomplished by the obedience of Jesus Christ. And this text represents, in contrast, the effects of the general perversion, or its progress in the conduct of individual sinners, and of “the grace” which effectually renovates and restores us.

The term "grace" signifies, in general, the undeserved kindness of God, united to the power which renders it effectual to attain its end : And the text affirms, that in all its different forms and aspects, "the grace of God," to those who receive it, has far exceeded the measure and the effects of their perversion.

I shall suggest illustrations of this doctrine, as it relates to the state of mankind, or is applied to individuals ; and, with this view, shall consider "the grace of God," in contrast with the guilt and the depravity, with the miseries, with the mortality, and with the final perdition, which are represented in the Scriptures as the consequences of man's apostacy from his Creator.

"The grace of God abounds" even to those who persist in hardening their hearts against his authority. They experience his forbearance and his tender mercies, under every aggravation, and in every period, of their impenitence. The gospel, which contains the doctrine of redemption by Jesus Christ, its impressive warnings, its earnest admonitions, and the glorious prospects held out to those who turn from sin to God, are all addressed to them ; although they continue to

resist every good impression made on their minds, and render the most important information ineffectual, by their obstinate incredulity.

But it is evident, that while the apostle, on the one hand, directs our thoughts, by the text, to the general effects of the apostacy from God on the condition of mankind; on the other hand, in representing “ grace as abounding more than sin,” he refers exclusively to the situations of those, to whom the gospel is effectually preached, and who “ believe to the saving of their souls.” “ They receive not the grace of God in vain *.” The effects and the dominion of sin are both completely and finally destroyed, by “ the grace which bringeth them salvation, and hath appeared unto all men.” “ Grace abounds” to them, and predominates in their experience, “ much more than sin ;” for they are effectually “ turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God †.” Sin brought death and every other evil on the earth. But the dominion of grace is far greater, when it not only secures, to those who believe and obey

* 2 Cor. vi. 1.

† Acts xxvi. 18.

the gospel, a state of being as happy as that which was forfeited by the apostacy of man, but effectually puts them in possession of "eternal life" among the angels of God, who "have kept their first estate." This is precisely the illustration which the apostle has given us of the assertion in the text: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Sin reigned unto death: Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord *."

Keeping this idea in our minds, that it is "grace" effectual to attain its end, which the apostle has stated, in contrast with the effects which sin has produced on the condition of the world,

Let us consider,

I. The guilt and depravity of men.

"By one man sin entered into the world †;" and "by his disobedience, many were made sinners †."

This is no speculation which we may controvert or reject. Asserted in the gospel, it is a me-

* Romans v. 21.

† Romans v. 12.

‡ Romans v. 19.

lancholy fact, engraven on the consciences of mankind, and on the history of ages.

The guilt which, from the earliest time, has overspread the face of the earth ; or the depravity which adheres to every country, and to every condition of human life ; no man, who is capable of deliberate reflection, will find it possible to deny. The vices which debase the most ignorant and barbarous people, and the vices which spring up and multiply, with the arts of society, and with the luxuries of mankind : the imbecility of men in every situation of human nature, with regard to their moral and religious obligations ; the weakness of those who find temptations every where around them ; of those who, even in resisting temptations, have perpetual struggles to maintain ; and of those whom successive temptations overwhelm with every aggravation of guilt and ruin : the probation, the discipline, the penitence, “ the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*,” which Christianity, adapting itself to the state of our minds, universally prescribes and

* Titus iii. 5.

requires : and the visible characters of the moral government of God, impressed on the whole series of external events—are facts in the state of the world, which hold out to us irresistible demonstrations, that the original fall was the fall of the human race ; and that guilt and depravity are in every age, since the first transgression, universal on the earth.

The characters of individuals are not the same, nor the vices which prevail in different situations ; nor their progress, nor their peculiar circumstances, nor their aggravations, nor the enormity which we ascribe to them. We are accustomed to estimate, as well as to distinguish, the different degrees of depravity. We can perceive sins and infirmities, which are mixed with many contrary dispositions or intentions. We see vice in its dawn, and vice in its progress ; sins committed from ignorance, surprise, or imbecility ; and crimes which are the effects of deliberate contrivance or design ; sinners falling into early or into great transgressions, and trembling under the reproaches of their own minds ; and sinners hardened against every good im-

pression, “filling up the measure of their iniquities.”

But whatever the degrees of individual depravity are, it is impossible not to perceive in all these different views of human life, the inseparable characters of the first apostacy. “By one man’s disobedience, *the many* * were made sinners.” Wherever men have been, “has sin abounded;” and different as its progress and its aspects are, its living and indelible memorials are in every land, and are transmitted from age to age.

Men who are guided by the spirit of the world, do not admit either the general guilt, or the general depravation, which Christianity affirms, and experience demonstrates; although the steady resolution with which they resist every admonition from religion, contrary to their ruling passions, is by itself a proof of their relation to the first transgressor. But if we turn to him who has been effectually roused to repentance by the awe of God; the fact which I have stated (for it is as much a fact as a doctrine) will be found to come home to his

* οἱ πολλοί.

* Rom. v. 19.

conscience, “in demonstration of the spirit and of power.” The consciousness of the personal guilt, of which he repents before God, with deep humiliation, and with bitter regrets, is accompanied with a clear perception of the effects of sin on the conditions of mankind; and of its unhappy influence or dominion in the situations of human life, within his sphere of observation. The monuments of the original apostacy, though the spirit of the world disguises them under specious names, and varnishes them by artificial systems, make a deep impression on his mind, in the hour of prayer and penitence; while he thinks, with awful conviction, of “the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”*

If we rehearse the assertion of this text, to him who is conscious of this state of mind, and if he relies on it as a fact, he hears it, as the signal of “life from the dead.” “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:” Not merely the forbearance of punishment, but “the grace” which effectually saves the guilty, and restores

* Romans i. 18.

them : not “ grace ” commensurate to one great offence, or to the sins of many individuals ; but “ grace ” from the God of heaven, to “ the chief of sinners ” on the earth : “ Grace,” which embraces, with the same effect, sinners of the first, and sinners of the latest age ; “ Grace,” conveyed by means, which are completely effectual for the regeneration of men, and for the glory of God : “ Grace,” which repairs the effects of the first man’s disobedience on the earth, by means of the incarnation and obedience of “ the only begotten of the Father ;” whom “ God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood ;” * and who suffers and dies in the flesh, to offer a propitiatory sacrifice for our fallen race.

The apostle illustrates “ Grace as abounding much more than sin,” by representing the fall of the world as the result of one offence, and “ the grace ” which repairs the ruins of the fall, as extending to the transgressions of men from age to age. “ The judgment was by one to condemnation ; but the free gift is of many of-

* Romans iii. 25.

fences unto justification.” * And we must perceive, that when the sources and the means of our salvation are placed together, the contrast of “grace” to “sin,” goes far beyond even this assertion. :

The depravity of mankind is transmitted from one generation to another. Guilt and impenitence go hand in hand. But “the father of mercies, the God of all comfort,” † thinks with compassion and with love of his fallen creatures, though they are at enmity with him. “He lays their help on one mighty to save :” ‡ “He spares not his own son, but delivers him up for us all.” § “The only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth,” ¶ at his command, humbles himself, and becomes a man on the earth ; “A man of sorrows ;” || a man “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross ;” ** A man “smitten of God and afflicted,” †† for “the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all ;” †††

* Rom. v. 16.

† 2 Cor. i. 3.

‡ Ps. lxxxix. 19. Isaiah lxiii. 1.

§ Rom. xviii. 32.

¶ St John i. 14.

|| Isaiah liii. 3.

** Phil. ii. 8.

†† Isaiah liii. 3.

††† Isaiah liii. 6.

a man “offering himself without spot unto God,”* that “we might have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” † The son of God, in the form of man, expires in torment, that he may “redeem us from the curse” ‡ denounced against transgressors, and make atonement to God for us all.

The reign of grace on earth was then established, when the great Redeemer “cried with a loud voice” § on the cross, “It is finished, and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” ¶ When “he was raised from the dead, to die no more;” || his triumph was complete, and the powers of sin and death were for ever vanquished. “The ground was cursed” at first, “for the sake of man;”** and when Christ “made his soul an offering for sin,” the earth trembled, and the rocks were rent beside him. †† But when he was “declared to be the son of God with power,

* Heb. ix. 14.

† Ephes. i. 7.

‡ Gallat. iii. 13.

§ Matth. xxvii 50

¶ St John xix. 30.

|| Rom. vi. 9.

** Gen. iii. 17.

†† Matth. 27. 51.

by his resurrection from the dead, it was no more "the curse" which he proclaimed to the world: It was "the grace" and blessing of the everlasting God; "peace on earth, and good will to men;"* "peace" to sinners, "redeemed unto God," and returning to him; and "good will," where "sin abounded." How infinitely interesting and impressive, is the doctrine of "grace," promulgated from the cross of Christ!

Did we hear for the first time, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them"; and "that he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;"† we might well contemplate with astonishment and awe, events so important, and yet so far above our apprehension. But our ideas of "grace abounding more than sin," rise higher, in proportion to our earnest and habitual attention to the subject, when we find, in these unparalleled events, the

* Luke ii. 14.

† 2 Cor. v. 19. 21.

doctrine of salvation and of the remission of sins, published for the faith of all nations; and the efficacy of the great propitiatory sacrifice, extending back to the first moment, from which “sin abounded,” and reaching forward to the latest trace, and to the last abode of sin on earth. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments!—For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him?—For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory for ever, Amen.”*

But there is another view of “grace,” in contrast with guilt and depravity. Christ died for sinners: and God raised him from the dead, “and exalted him at his right hand, a prince and a saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins;”† to dispense the pardon for which he shed his blood, and to sanctify those “who come to God by him,” for the glory of his grace, and for “the day of redemption.”

* Rom. xi. 33--35.

† Acts v. 31.

Christianity represents the remission of sins through the blood of atonement, as inseparably conjoined and united, in those who receive it, to purity of principle and of conduct, which the scriptures express by "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." * Were it possible to imagine the contrary supposition, it would make Christ "the minister of sin : " And this the apostle Paul has expressly stated, in his address to the Gallatians on the subject. " If while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin ? God forbid." † The genuine doctrine of the gospel represents purity of mind, and holiness of life, as essential characters of those " who believe to the saving of their souls ; " without which, they would neither be at peace with themselves, nor have any sound reason to conclude, that they are in peace with God.

But on the other hand, as all our talents and endowments are derived from God, and " every good and perfect gift cometh down from him ; " ‡

* Heb. xii. 14.

† Gallat. ii. 17.

‡ James i. 17.

Christianity ascribes to “the grace which brings salvation” to the world, and to “the promise of the father” through the intercession of Christ, “to give the holy spirit to them who ask him,” all the sanctification of men : their first impressions of godliness and duty ; their first conversion from sin to God ; and all their progress in good works and patience. “By the grace of God, said the apostle Paul, I am what I am : and his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain ; but I laboured more abundantly than all the apostles ; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” *

We contemplate, with peculiar emotion, “the grace” of Christ, when, in the language of the New Testament, he “seeks † a sinner, to save him,” who is far from God : “The grace” which imperceptibly works within him, and, by external means suited to his peculiar temper, gradually moulds his heart to penitence and prayer : “The grace” which, by considerations

* 1 Cor. xv. 10

† Luke xix. 10.

adapted to his character, persuades him to embrace with ardour the salvation of God; which invigorates the good intentions of his mind, and which purifies his motives and affections: The grace which determines him to rest his happiness on his faith and hopes, and on his fidelity to God and men; which effectually forms within him “the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind;”* which teaches him “the prayer of faith,” and “fills him with peace and joy in believing:” “The grace” which sends him with earnest solicitude, to every duty, and which “thoroughly furnishes him for every good work;” “The grace” which, “in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of peace,” “pours out the spirit of God” to dwell within him.

“The reign of grace” † destroys for ever the dominion of sin. Like the fall of the world, it has many aspects in human characters: but it is “the great salvation of God” on the earth. “The children of God,” every one in his own place, and by means adapted to his peculiar situation, “are gathered together in one ‡,” “from the

* 2 Tim. i. 7. † 1 Rom. v. 21.

‡ St John xi. 52.

east and from the west, and from the north, and from the south." The multitude of men, redeemed unto God from guilt and sin, are monuments in every land, of "the grace" which renovates the world; of "peace in heaven"* and earth, and "glory in the highest."

We shall find another view of "grace abounding more than sin," by considering

II. The miseries of human life.

The calamities of men began with the original apostacy from God. In Adam's paradise, the earth brought forth, without culture, her most precious fruits. Every living creature obeyed his call, and added to his store of blessings; and neither care, nor sufferings, nor debility, nor decay, were permitted to approach him.

The fall of man from innocence reversed the condition, and destroyed the order of the world. From that moment, he possessed a paradise no more. He was driven into a wilderness †; doomed "to eat his bread, in the sweat of his face;" ‡ and "in sorrow were his children

* Luke xix. 19. † Gen. iii. 24.

‡ Gen. iii. 19.

born." * All nature around him became, from that time, full of toil, and strife, and pain, and disease, and sorrow; and "the whole creation groaned together." †

The calamities of human life justify this representation of our fallen state. They have spread and multiplied from the first transgressor, through all the ages and generations of the world. The calamities which afflict our bodies, their weakness or their wants, their diseases or their decay; the calamities which spring up from the contending interests, and from the boisterous or malignant passions of the world; the calamities which vice creates wherever it predominates, or which vice transmits from man to man; the calamities which torment us by means of our affections, and the regrets connected with every earthly satisfaction; the clouds which hover around every human dwelling; "the keepers of the house who tremble; the mourners who go about the streets;" ‡ and "the heart which knows its own bitterness;" §

* Gen. iii. 16.

† Rom. viii. 22,

‡ Eccles. xi. 3. 5.

§ Prov. xiv. 10.

which shuts out the light of day, and resigns itself to darkness or despair; are all impressive and perpetual memorials, of the original curse on the fall of man: indelible memorials, of the effects of sin on the condition of sinners; and of the calamities of sinful men, amidst all the delusions of a fallen world.

I am not exaggerating the calamities of mankind; though it is obvious that they have many different aspects in the lot of individuals. One man is pressed down by afflictions, from his birth to his grave; while the sufferings of another are, in comparison, scarcely to be discerned, and are compensated by many satisfactions. But every situation of human life has its share of the miseries, which sin has brought into the world; and though "a man live many years, and rejoice in them all," he has good reason "to remember (or to prepare himself for) the days of darkness, lest they should be many*." Wherever we trace the lineaments of the first transgressor, we find sorrows and calamities universally entailed on his descendants.

Those who do not take their views of life

* Eccles. xi. 8.

from religion, and who imagine human nature to have been always what it is, do not see the fall of man in his calamities. When they suffer, they seek their consolations from the sensible world, and have no reliance on the doctrine, which affirms “the grace” of God “to abound” on earth, yet more than the miseries of men.

We must turn to those who have learned, both from religion and experience, to perceive what sin has done to bring sorrows on the earth, in order to find a proper estimate of “grace abounding more.” They know and feel, that “the grace,” which Christianity reveals for the salvation of men, holds out the true resources of the miserable, and the only certain antidotes, to the calamities of the human race.

It was affirmed by the prophet Isaiah, to be the leading object of the Messiah, “to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion—Beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness:”^{*} And a similar description, recorded by the prophet, † was employed by the Lord himself, to

^{*} Isaiah lxi. 3.

† Isaiah lxi. 1, 2.

give the first impression of the gospel, when he began to preach in the synagogue of Nazareth. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised ; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." *

Christianity does not profess to release us from calamities in the present world ; for probation, and probationary sufferings, are become inseparable from the degenerate state of human nature. But Christianity professes to convert our calamities into salutary discipline. It professes to sustain our courage, and to support us under them. It professes to alleviate their pressure or severity. It professes to render them the means of our gradual release from "the bondage of corruption," and of our progress in "the glorious liberty of the children of God." It professes to compensate, by the most permanent satisfactions, whatsoever we are required to suffer. If

* Luke iv. 18, 19, 21.

these ends are effectually attained, nothing can be more certain, than that "the grace" of God "abounds much more," than either miseries or sin.

We can follow the contrast of "grace" to sorrow, in the experience of those who know what vital religion is, and who "have seen the salvation of God."

We have many striking opportunities, in common life, of observing "the grace" of God to a sinful man, when he effectually employs the discipline of calamities, to turn, or to change the dispositions of his heart; to give him his first, or his strongest impressions of godliness and purity, of fidelity in his personal duties, or of the hope of salvation at last; to humble his passions, to check his presumption, or to subdue his pride; to rouse him into ardour, or to send him to good works with patience; to lead him, by a sure but imperceptible progress, from the sorrows of repentance, to "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." It is deeply interesting to a good man, to recollect the effects of the influence of God on his mind, which he believes to have reconciled him to his bitterest cup of af-

affliction ; to recollect the “ grace ” which proportions his courage to his lot, his hopes to his sufferings, his faith to the discipline appointed him ; the “ grace ” which sanctifies the time of suffering, for the hour of temptation, the pressure of afflictions for the situations in which his fidelity is severely tried, the progress and the duration of his present calamities, for the glories of “ the latter day.”

Who shall say, that he has suffered in vain, or that he suffers without consolation, who shall find his place at last among the sons of God ? The time is not distant, when the progress of “ grace ” on earth, and its triumph over every human calamity, shall be completed. There shall then be sin no more : the probation of man shall then be finished : miseries shall cease for ever among the sons of light : and grace shall reign, where no sorrow is.

Were the influence of vital religion universal on the earth, its effects on the situations of mankind would be universal also. Calamities would everywhere be converted into blessings ; and the universal regeneration of the world would everywhere begin. The description of the prophet

would be effectually realised: "The child might play on the hole of the asp," or "put his hand on the cockatrice den," where there would be nothing "to hurt or to destroy." ¶

It is delightful to believe, that such glorious events are in any form or degree approaching, and that the reign of "grace" shall be at last established. "Father, in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven." * "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he who came in the name of the Lord:" † He who was sent from heaven "for salvation to the ends of the earth:" ‡ He who came "to heal the broken hearted," § and "to comfort all who mourn." ||

Another illustration of the doctrine of the text may be suggested, by considering,

III. The mortality of mankind.

Mortality is not an original attribute of human nature. Pure when he proceeded from his Maker's hand, man was formed to live for ever.

¶ Isaiah xi. 8, 9.

* Matth. vi. 9, 10.

† Matth. xxi. 9.

‡ Acts xiii. 47.

§ Luke iv. 18.

|| Isaiah lxi. 2.

Whatever change in the state of his being he might have experienced, from the progress of perfect virtue and happiness among the sons of God, as long as he preserved his innocence, he was beyond the reach of death.

We are taught by the gospel, to ascribe to sin, which is the source of all our other calamities, the introduction of mortality also among mankind. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.—Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them who had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression:"* And from age to age, in every period and condition of human life, it is the inseparable and irrevocable destiny of man.

Religion holds out to us no exemption from the general law, by which "it is appointed unto men once to die." † But it is the attribute of God to bring light from darkness, our restoration from our fall, consolation from the grave, and life from the dead. "Sin hath reigned unto death;" and the reign of "grace" begins with

* Romans v. 12. 14.

† Heb. ix. 27.

the triumph of the Son of God, over death and sin.

“ God sent his only begotten Son into the world” to die, “ that we might live through him :” † To die, “ that, through death, he might destroy him who had the power of death ; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage :” ‡ To die, that “ God might raise him up, because it was not possible that death could hold him :” § To die, that he might rise from the dead, as a conqueror, “ leading captivity captive,” and might be “ the first fruits of them who sleep :” To die, that he might become “ the resurrection and the life,” to those who believe in him ; and might sanctify the grave for them, as a place of rest and peace, till “ the day of their redemption” comes.

His resurrection is the great fact on which the gospel rests its authority, and from which we derive our most permanent consolations. We know “ that it is not a thing incredible that God

† 1. John iv. 9.

‡ Heb. ii. 14, 15.

§ Acts ii. 24.

should raise the dead," or that "the dead in Christ" should be destined to live with him after the general resurrection; and are certain that the resurrection of Christ is supported by evidence, such as we are accustomed to receive with confidence in every other case; and such as we acknowledge to be sufficient to govern our conduct, in the most interesting concerns of the present life.

What an important fact is the resurrection of the Lord, in the reign of "grace!" "If by one man's offence, death reigned by one; much more, they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life, by one Jesus Christ."*

"Grace" reigns; for they who believe and obey the gospel are certain of their victory over death, since Christ has risen from the dead. Though "the dust returns to the earth as it was, their spirits return to God who gave them:" † Their dust itself is precious, and "Christ shall raise it up at the last day." ‡

* Rom. v. 17.

† Eccles. xii. 7.

‡ St John vi. 39.

“Grace” reigns, to assure us concerning “those who are asleep” in Christ, that they are not lost to us, or to themselves; that they sleep in peace; that because Christ has risen from the dead, they shall rise again; that “in their flesh they shall see God;” and that, if we are “followers of them,” we shall, in due time, find our place among them.

“Grace” reigns, to deliver us from the fear of death; and to teach us how to live, that we may learn how to die: To tell us of the grave, that the Lord was there: To tell us of the resurrection, that “the Lord is risen indeed,” and that “the dead in Christ” shall rise together, to live with him; that not one of them “shall perish;” and that they shall see with their eyes “the great salvation of God:” To tell us of the glory of “the first resurrection,” and of “the general assembly and church of the first born,” “whose names are written in heaven.”

“Grace” reigns; “and blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”*

* Rev. xiv. 13.

The reign of “ grace ” is at last completely established ; for the Son of God, “ the first begotten of the dead,”* looks down from heaven, and says to his disciples in the world, “ Fear not ; I am the first and the last ; I am he that liveth, and was dead ; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and death.” †

“ Sin has abounded ” on the earth, and “ death by sin : ” But “ grace much more abounds ; ” since we are sure that the resurrection of the Lord is the pledge from heaven, that they shall rise again, whom he has redeemed unto God. “ Sin has reigned unto death ; but grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.” ‡ “ Death will at last be swallowed up in victory : ” || And, if we are Christ’s, we are certain, that there is a place “ prepared for us ” among the sons of light, where we have the promise of the everlasting God, that “ there shall be no more death ” for ever.

* Rev. i. 5.

† Rev. i. 17, 18.

‡ Rom. v. 21.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 54.

We shall have another view of “ grace a-bounding more than sin,” if we consider,

IV. The final perdition, which is represented in the scriptures, as the last consequence of the fall of man.

Every idea which we can form of the moral government of God, or of the general doctrine of rewards and punishments asserted in the gospel, leads us to believe, that the final punishment of obstinate guilt must far exceed the unequal allotment of miseries, experienced in the present life; and therefore supposes an existence after death, in which every impenitent man shall suffer the consequences of his obdurate depravity.

Christianity affirms this event to be the certain result of the probation, under which mankind are placed, in the present life; and has given us the most minute and explicit information with regard to it. It represents the whole multitude of wicked and impenitent men raised from their graves, after the resurrection of “ the dead in Christ;” not to enjoy another life, or to experience a new probation; but

to stand “before the judgment seat of Christ,” where every individual is to receive a final and irrevocable sentence, according to “the deeds done in the body.” It represents the punishment to be inflicted on them, by the last sentence of the “judge of all,” as commensurate to the guilt of obstinate and final apostacy from the eternal God; and affirms, that they are doomed to suffer for “ever the anguish of unquenchable fire;”* associated with all the apostate spirits, who have persisted in their rebellion against their maker.

“This is the second death.”† It was comprehended in the original sentence, which denounced death on the apostacy of man, as well as the mortality of the body. We are led directly to this conclusion, by the contrast which the apostle has stated betwixt death, as the punishment of sin, and “eternal life,” as the result of the grace of God by Christ. “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”‡ It is expressed in language still more precise, when the first re-

* Matth. iii. 12.

† Rev. xxi. 8.

‡ Rom. vi. 23.

surrection is stated in contrast with the second death. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power."† It is represented in the most striking light, when after a minute description of "the judgment of the great day," and of the sentence to be then pronounced on "every man, according to his works," the last punishment of obstinate impenitence "in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," (the usual emblems of future punishment in the New Testament) is expressly affirmed to be "the second death:" "Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire: This is the second death: And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."‡ "The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."§

† Rev. xx. 6.

‡ Rev. xx. 12—15.

§ Rev. xxi. 8.

The description of apostacy, terminating in eternal punishment, requires but to be mentioned, to awaken every idea of horror. How important is it, that men should have warning given them of that which is the inevitable consequence of their depravity, "except they repent!" How infinitely important to them, that the means should be placed within their reach, "to fly from wrath to come!"

"The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, has appeared unto all men;" "that whosoever believeth on the son of God, might not perish, but might have everlasting life." On the other hand, nothing can be more certain, than that for those who deliberately persist in their impenitence, and "reject the counsel of God against themselves," "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." With whatever degree of insensibility, "they bear their iniquity" till they die, they have every thing awful to apprehend, in "the second death."

While we have this impression on our minds, how exquisitely consoling is it to know, "that grace abounds much more than sin," in those who

sincerely believe and obey the gospel! And that being sanctified by the faith of the gospel, they have "good," or well-founded, "hope through grace," that "they shall have their part in the first resurrection," that "over them the second death may have no power."

Think, my brethren, with delight and joy, of "grace reigning," by the dominion of the Son of God, that they who believe on him "may not be hurt by the second death;" that they may be completely separated from the apostacy, and from the apostate spirits; that they may not only be effectually shielded at last from "the wrath to come," but raised to the participation of the glory of Sons of God; when God creates for them "new heavens and a new earth,"* in which there can be no apostacy, or misery, or curse, or death, for ever.

Think of "the grace" which assembles together, "with everlasting joy," a "multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, before the

* 2 Peter iii. 13.

throne, and before the Lamb ;” * and of the “ grace,” which reigns through eternal ages among that multitude, of which every individual is perfect in goodness, perfect in happiness, perfect in love, “ perfect and complete in all the will of God,” “ to the glory of God the father.” †

The reign of “ grace” is the triumph of the Son of God : It is the destruction of sin, and of Satan’s empire ; it is the kingdom of God, which is established for ever ; the final regeneration of the Sons of God, when “ the first heaven and the first earth shall have passed away,” ‡ “ and God shall be all in all.” §

While we dwell with delight on these different views of “ grace abounding more than sin,” it is impossible to forget the miseries of those, who deliberately attach both their satisfactions and their lot, to the old creation, and to the reign of sin.

Would to God it were possible to convince them of the real misery in which they live ; for

* Rev. vii. 9.

† Philip. ii. 11.

‡ Rev. xxi. 1.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 28.

miserable they are, amidst all the delusions of this world; or to persuade them of the certainty of the awful perdition before them, if “they shall die in their sins.” But it is of the last importance to remind them, that they have still “space to repent;” and that by the grace of God, we are required both to encourage, and to beseech them, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, “to be reconciled unto God”; to turn and to repent, “that they may obtain mercy, before the day of probation expires, and that “the free gift may come on them also, to justification, and” eternal “life.” *

But before I conclude, I must beseech those, who sincerely believe and obey the gospel, to consider, with the most earnest attention, an apostolical admonition, intimately connected with every part of the doctrine, which I have endeavoured to illustrate; and which goes deep into the spirit and power of “the gospel of the grace of God.”

“What shall we say then,” says the apostle, after having asserted the doctrine of this text,

* Rom. v. 18.

“ Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we who are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Christ, raised from the dead, dieth no more: Likewise reckon ye yourselves, to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.—For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

* Rom. vi. 1. 2. 9. 11. 23.

SERMON IX.

ON THE
CONDUCT OF PROVIDENCE TO GOOD MEN.

ROMANS viii. 28.

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

THIS text is introduced, in connection with some of the most animated descriptions in the New Testament, of the views, and of the state of mind, peculiar to those who sincerely embrace Christianity; and who are described, at the beginning of this chapter, as men “who are in Christ Jesus, and who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.” It expresses, in direct and unqualified terms, the universal subserviency of the events of this life, under the influence of God, to all their essential and permanent inte-

rests ; and it affirms that their reliance on this fact, proceeds, not only from a full persuasion, but from an intimate knowledge of its certainty.

I am, in discoursing on the text, to illustrate the sources, from which good men derive their knowledge on this subject.

“ They know that all things work together for good, to them who love God :”

1. From the declared intentions of God with regard to those “ who love him.”

2. From their attention to the minute history and progress of human life. And,

3. From their personal experience of the conduct of Providence.

I observe,

I. That good men know, with certainty, the subserviency of the events of this life to their permanent interests, from the declared intentions of God with regard to those “ who love him.”

This is the statement given by the apostle in the section from which this text is taken. He first describes those to whom the assertion is applied, as men “ who love God, and who are the called according to his purpose ;” and then he affirms that the circumstances of their progress to

the kingdom of heaven, are inseparably united, by the wisdom and power of God, till their probation is finished, and their salvation is complete *. While he represents the entire security of "the many brethren," among whom Christ is the "first born," with regard to all their interests in this world, and in the world to come, and every step they advance, as leading directly to another; he derives their security, from the original intentions of God for their advantage, and from the perpetual exercise of his providence and grace, to render the events of this life the means of promoting them.

When this doctrine is applied to the assertion of the text, restricted, as it is, to those "who love God," it is addressed directly to their personal feelings. Regulated by him, every circumstance in their lot must answer his intentions. Every event which they experience, whatever its external aspect is, and whether it shall, at the moment when it happens, produce satisfactions or afflictions, must ultimately lead to the end which is at last to be attained.

“ It is their Father’s good pleasure to give them the kingdom of heaven ;” and they are certain, that it is his gracious intention to render their salvation complete, by means of the discipline and the duties, the advantages and the talents, the trials and the temptations, the prosperity and the adversities of this life ; by means of the ordinances of religion, and the dispensations of Providence ; continued with such circumstances and variations, as their different tempers and situations require, till their probation attains its end, and they are permitted to find their passage, through death, to the happiness of the invisible world.

They are sometimes required to suffer long, and often to experience severe disappointments. But while they know the end to be secured, they know that their heaviest trials are selected by the wisdom of God. They ought therefore to believe, that they are the means best adapted to their peculiar characters ; and that, by the sorrows which they create, by the affections which they excite, or by the prayer which they suggest, he sanctifies their conditions, and purifies their hearts, or revives their ardour, or checks

their passions, or confirms the faith which is not strong, or the faith which has been shaken or endangered. They have the best reasons to be assured of the final result of every dispensation, in which their interests are involved; and (as I shall afterwards shew) learn to perceive, in the events which they experience, the means by which it is promoted. Their reliance on the intentions of God, sheds a light around the darkest passages of human life; and enables them, even from the gloom of the house of mourning, to discern the kindness which never deserts them, and to give thanks to the God of their salvation. "If God be for us," says the apostle Paul, "who can be against us? He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?—Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?—Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor

depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." *

The doctrine of this text is addressed to those "who love God, and who are conformed to the image of his Son;" and is incapable of any fair construction, by which men, without principle or morals, can, in any instance, apply it to themselves. Every one will therefore perceive, that, to enjoy the comfort resulting from these illustrations of it, we must have good reason to believe that we possess the character to which it is restricted; and must be sensible, at the same time, that this is equally true, with regard to every view which can be taken, either of the hopes of a Christian, or of the precious promises on which they depend. We must have the feelings and dispositions of religious men, before we can either possess their consolations, or be able to apply them to the situations to which they are directed.

On the other hand, it is certain, that every man may have such an intimate knowledge of the state of his mind, as to be able to ascertain to his own satisfaction, whether "he loves God"

* Romans viii. 31. 32.—35.—37. 38. 39.

with the sincerity of the disciples of Christ; whether he can contemplate the intentions of God, with the personal confidence of religious men; and whether he has such an habitual sense of duty and religion, as to discern, with real interest and satisfaction, the dominion and the wisdom of God in the vicissitudes of human life; and to rely on his immutable purpose and grace, both for their present effects, and for their final result and end in the kingdom of heaven.

By pursuing the subject, we shall find that every view of the conduct of Providence accords with the original intentions of God, and serves to confirm the faith of those "who love him." And therefore I observe,

II. That good men "know, that all things work together for their good," from their attention to the minute history and progress of human life.

We are certainly incompetent judges of that which is either good or best for individual men; and are equally incapable of ascertaining exactly, the rules and the means, by which the designs of God are accomplished in the present world. But notwithstanding the limits which must bound

our inquiries, we receive both precise and substantial information on the subject, from the situations of those among whom we live, when we have the patience necessary to form an estimate of the events which they experience, and to observe their remote, as well as their immediate, effects.

There are many events in the lot of individuals, at first considered as heavy, and even as hopeless, afflictions, which, in the progress of things, are followed by consequences, not only sufficient to compensate their severity, but which take away from them almost every appearance of affliction.

In our own situations, our personal sufferings, the disappointment of our wishes, or events which bear hard on our affections, often mislead our understandings; and render it as difficult for us to connect our advantages with our calamities, as we are unwilling to perceive their relation to each other. But we are more dispassionate in considering the discipline which other men experience; and observe both its first aspect, and its distant effects, with more impartiality. Enlightened by the gospel, we follow

with our eye its influence on themselves, and on their families, and on the conditions of human life, with which they are connected. As spectators, we can trace its remote consequences to their cause, with as much certainty as its immediate effects; and perceive more readily than from our own experience, that the best advantages which they attain, are often visibly marked as the result of their heaviest calamities.

The most striking examples which can be given to illustrate this doctrine, are perhaps those which are suggested by the ravages of death, in situations, in which much is supposed to have depended on the lives of those who are taken away. There are no events more severely felt at the time when they occur, and none, of which the apparent tendency is more unfavourable to those who are chiefly interested. On the other hand, there are no calamities, which the providence of God more frequently renders the means of promoting the permanent interests of those who suffer from them, or which, by their consequences, ought to be considered as more impressive demonstrations of the truth of the doctrine in this text.

The death of good men, and the death of those who have neither worth nor character, may, in certain circumstances, equally afford us examples to illustrate this assertion. Both may materially affect the situation of individuals, and excite their strongest feelings. Their effects are equally subject to the wisdom and providence of God; and are very often indeed, extremely different from their apparent tendency.

When a good man dies, it is impossible that those, who are immediately connected with him, should not feel severely. But the calamity which his death occasions, is peculiarly aggravated, if he is the father of a family, or has many friendless or helpless beings, who depend on his activity or his beneficence; and if he is taken from the world in the vigour of his life, and in the midst of his usefulness, while he is yet capable of the most active employments. The calamity is extremely heightened, if his family are left orphans in the world, with no external resources or protection on which they can rely.

There are few events which we can observe around us, of which the first aspect is darker, or more depressing. Every department of duty

or usefulness, which we connect with him who is taken away, adds to our impression of the calamity which his death occasions, and to the gloom which covers it.

On the other hand, we are soon convinced by observation, how remote our first conclusions are, from the real consequences of such an event. If a man dies, full of faith and of good works, we can have no regrets on his own account; and I have shewn, in a former discourse*, in how many ways the providence of God secures to the families of worthy men, both the means and the protection, which lead them on to prosperity. The only fact to which I request your attention at present, and which I mention from its connection with other facts suggested by the subject before us, is, that the untimely death of a good man, and the unprotected state of his family, the circumstances which apparently constitute the greatest part of their calamity, are precisely the circumstances, which the providence of God most commonly selects, to secure to them the help and attention which they require, in

* Sermon VII.

their progress to active life. “A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.”* By his blessing, the children of a faithful man attain situations after his decease, to which, in the usual course of events, they would have had no access, if he had been preserved to them. If they are worthy of the race of which they are descended, they come forward, and effectually supply his place to the world; and the providence of God not seldom affords them the means, to emulate both his usefulness and his virtues.

Though the progress as well as the characters of different families, left in similar circumstances, must of necessity be very different, it will at least be admitted, that we see enough in the course of human life, to warrant us in considering the unprotected children of good men, as monuments which the hand of Providence continues to rear before us; to shew, that, by the influence of God, “all things work together for good to them who love him,” and to their children after them.

The death of a man who is known to have

* Psalm lxxviii. 5.

been destitute both of principle and morals, an event very different from this, will be observed, in many instances, to have the same general result.

If he is driven, in his wickedness, to an untimely grave, and his family are also left helpless and dependent, it is impossible not to be sensible of the severity of a calamity, which has every aggravation attending it, which it can derive from his personal character.

On the other hand, the consequences of this calamity will very frequently have just the contrary appearance. The family of such a man will often be found to receive the most important advantages of their youth, and their best preparation for active life, by means of an event, which effectually separates them from him, and from all the effects of his tuition. Removed from the unprincipled lessons, and from the pernicious example, which, if he had lived, he would certainly have given them; if, in the course of providence, God entrusts them to the care, or places them under the influence of those, whom he directs and enables to train them, in godliness, in sincerity, in love to God, and in

fidelity to men ; their real prosperity begins, by the blessing of heaven, with their first affliction, and is carried on by means of the situation to which it has introduced them. . They come forward into life, as new men, born into the world ; with all the advantage of good instruction, and faithful discipline : neither accustomed to idleness and folly, by their father's negligence ; nor tainted by his vices ; nor corrupted by his maxims ; as under his influence they would have been : but formed, by the kindness of heaven, in a far different school, to glorify God among their brethren ; and, if they shall abide by their early impressions, to distinguish themselves thro' life, by every worthy and estimable quality.

This is no hypothetical case, unsupported by facts and experience. Those who have lived long, or who have had sufficient opportunities of observing the means, by which individual men are introduced to the business of the world, will find many examples within their own knowledge, to justify this representation. They will recollect families, indebted, under God, for their prosperity, to events which placed them under better instructors than their parents would

have been : Families, whose habitation has become, by such providential means, what the house of their fathers never was, “ an habitation of God through the spirit : ” Families, followed by prosperity through life, who have good reason to refer the commencement of all the advantages they possess, to events, which the world set down as great calamities, but which the providence of God selected to demonstrate, that “ all things work together for good, to them who are the called according to his purpose. ”

There are not many afflictions which make a deeper impression, than the calamities which blast the prospects of youth and vigour, or which unexpectedly take our friends, or our children, from the world, in the morning of life.

We are seldom happier, than when we see those in whom we are deeply interested, entering into the world, with every promise of respect and usefulness ; with good personal talents, and an original strength of understanding ; with kind affections towards their intimate associates, and a faithful application to the duties of their youth ; and with every external appearance, to

afford them a reasonable prospect of a long and prosperous life.

On the other hand, we suffer one of the heaviest afflictions incident to men, when we see those who have originally possessed these advantages, unexpectedly arrested by calamities, which blast for ever every youthful expectation; by lingering and hopeless diseases; by unforeseen and irreparable disasters; or by a sudden and irresistible decline, which has scarcely been observed, till they sink into the grave.

Every circumstance, in this representation, is full of gloom. We can scarcely resist our inclination to ask, For what was their youth designed? Or, why are so many talents and affections combined, to perish without employment, and without a memorial?

We see but a small part of the designs of God: But on this subject, we may observe enough to satisfy our doubts, and to confirm our faith. Their youth is not spent in vain, who have early learned "to love God," and serve him. Their affections and their talents are not given them in vain, if they are able, even for the limited term prescribed, to apply them

successfully to the duties which they are capable of fulfilling. Their example itself is not in vain, nor the temper of their minds, during the few years they are permitted to associate with their fellows. If they die before their time, it is the will of God, that "their testimony" in this world should be chiefly given, by means of the dispositions and the industry of youth ; by means of early sufferings, and untimely death ;* or, by the virtues which a state of suffering requires in them "who love God ;" by patience and resignation, and trust in God ; by kindness and gratitude to those who assist them in their afflictions ; by the faith which overcomes both sorrow and death ; by "the blessed hope," which enables them to count as nothing, all that they relinquish in resigning the expectations of this world ; or by a calm and deliberate preparation for eternity, in which every feeling and desire of youth gives place, to the glorious anticipation of the great salvation of God.

There is nothing in all the distinctions of this world, to be compared with a life and death,

* Luke xxi. 13. Heb. iii. 5. St John ix. 3.

of which these impressive memorials remain. If they are memorials of those in whom we have been affectionately interested, we have the satisfaction to know, that they lived and “died in the Lord.” Their term was short; but “their testimony” is not lost. They lived to shew, how God is found of them “who seek him early;” and how even the heaviest calamities which youth can experience, may qualify them to glorify him among their brethren. They died to prove, that what we lose on earth by the will of God, and in dutiful subjection to him, we gain an hundred-fold in heaven; and that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”* Their death, connected with the circumstances which attend it, gives a demonstration to the world, as decisive as the longest life affords us, “That all things work together for good, to them who love God.”

It is easy to multiply examples of severe afflictions, operating effectually for the advantage of those who experience them. Men, who attend to the minute progress of religion, will re-

* Psalm cxvi. 15.

collect many instances, in which calamities, which blast the expectations of individuals in this world, or which bring them to the brink of the grave, are sanctified by the grace of God, to direct them to their best views of their most important interests, or to rouse them to an effectual repentance. He who, during the course of his active life, has shut his mind against the most powerful considerations of religion, engrossed by the pleasures or perverted by the maxims of the world, will tremble before God under the immediate pressure of calamities ; and by their effect on his conscience, in contradiction to all his former life, will be compelled to consider with deep anxiety and solicitude, “ what he shall do to be saved.”

Though the best impressions, produced by heavy afflictions, do not always issue in conversion, and often unhappily last no longer than the occasions which produce them ; there are at least many instances, in which they are the most visible or effectual means known to us, by which individuals are brought to a lasting repentance ; or are persuaded, after having lived

in a very different state of mind, to subject themselves, heartily and earnestly, to the authority of the gospel.

Those are happy calamities, of which this is the result or the effect. They are selected for the glory of God, to accomplish an end, for which neither the considerations of reason, nor the advantages of prosperity, are effectual. If they contribute, by their influence on the mind and conscience, to gather into "the household of God" those "who are the called according to his purpose;" or to recover those whom the intercourse of the world has in any degree perverted; or to "strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die;" * they may well be set down as events, which furnish another illustration of the doctrine of this text, taken from the observation of human life. We can certainly recollect situations, in which good men are often restored, by means of afflictions, when they have sunk into languor, or have been betrayed by temptations; in which the discipline of affliction recalls them from

* Rev. iii. 2.

their errors ; or reminds them of the good works which they have not done ; or rebukes their negligence or their presumption ; or weans their affections from this life ; or warns them against their peculiar temptations ; or teaches them, by a severe experience of the vanity of the world and of wordly satisfactions, the inestimable value of the pure enjoyments of the sons of God, and of “ peace and joy in believing.”

But I ought to add, that the many instances in which good men experience disappointments, which ultimately become the instruments or means which save them from greater calamities, will also afford us striking examples, of the manner in which the providence of God regulates the events of this life, for the advantage of those, “ who shall be heirs of salvation.”

Every man of observation will recollect cases, in which individuals have been protected from the most serious evils, or have escaped from imminent dangers, by means of disappointments, which were at first the subjects of their severe regrets : or be able to mention examples, in which even their disappointments have been

converted, in the course of Providence, into positive blessings ; or have become, directly and exclusively, the means by which most important blessings have been bestowed on them.

In like manner, it is impossible not to observe, that the circumstances of good men are often varied, with every original appearance of disadvantage, when it is afterwards demonstrated, that the consequences are in every point in their favour. They discover, in the progress of events, that their situations have been changed by the wise interposition of God, in order to extend their usefulness, or to add to their personal comfort, or to bring them within a sphere of duty or activity, from which they must otherwise have been completely excluded.

There is a fact besides, of which a great variety of examples will occur to us. The kindness of God to faithful men, is not seldom connected with the time at which they are taken from the world. He takes them away, in tender mercy, "from the evil to come." * He selects the period of their death, to save them from evils, of which they could not have borne the

* Isaiah lvii 1.

pressure : From evils; of which there is no warning given during their lives ; but which follow hard after their decease.

All these examples are of the same kind : and there is scarcely any man's lot which will not suggest many circumstances to establish the conclusion, to which they direct us ; to demonstrate the entire subserviency of all things, under the moral government of God, to the permanent advantage of " those who love him." I have only mentioned a few specimens of the general history of Providence ; or of events, which have the appearance of calamities, which, in the lot of faithful men, are converted, by their effects or by their result, into substantial blessings.

The illustration of this view of the subject would be complete, if it were possible to represent the immense variety of instances, in which God sanctifies the revolutions of this world, and over-rules them ; the passions and the ambition of men, the hostilities and competitions of public and of private life, the malignity of some individuals, and the selfishness of others ; to promote the ends of his moral government among mankind ; to assist the progress of the gospel ;

to send the means of information “to those who sit in darkness;” to encourage the labours, to protect the innocence, and to comfort the families of faithful men.

The conduct of Providence is often varied, to suit the variety of ends, of interests, and of characters, to which it is adapted. But whatever the external situations are, which are allotted “to those who love God;” whatever their sphere of duty is; whatever the talents are with which they are entrusted; whether they suffer, or enjoy; and whether they live, or die;—“we know,” from all that we perceive in their conditions, that “the hand of the Lord is with them.” His blessing is in their prosperity, and in their sufferings, and in their labours, and in all their lot. “All things work together for their good;” so as to render both their present and their ultimate interests secure; to carry on their probation, by the most effectual means; and to qualify them, by the best discipline of this life, to become pure and happy at last among the sons of God.

I have said, that we have less prejudice and partiality, when we judge of the situations of

other men, than when we attempt to form an estimate of our own.

It is equally true, on the other hand, that what we observe has not the same effect on us, as that which we personally feel and experience. If we were equally dispassionate with regard to both, our experience is certainly our best source of information.—And therefore I add,

III. That good men “know, that all things work together” for their advantage, from their personal experience of the conduct of Providence.

To enable you to enter into this view of the subject, it is necessary that you should deliberately consult your own feelings, and endeavour to recollect coolly your own history.

Have ye been the children of Providence from your youth? Recollect the time when ye were friendless in the world; that important time, when the peculiar difficulties which ye had to encounter, were directed by the wisdom of Providence, to raise up those, who comforted and blessed you in the name of the Lord, and by whose help ye have obtained advantages for this

world, from which an earlier prosperity would have effectually debarred you.

Look back to the circumstances in your progress through life, which it was most difficult to bear : to your first, or your greatest disappointments ; to the friends who deserted you, when ye had most occasion for their help ; and to the resources on which ye relied, which failed you, when ye tried them. And, on the other hand, recollect before God, in how many instances, the advantages which ye have since enjoyed, and the prosperity which ye have since attained, have been, directly or remotely, the consequences of the hardships which went before them. The very events which ye considered as your heaviest misfortunes, when ye experienced them, are precisely the means which have stimulated your industry, or taught you the value of talents which were before neglected, or opened to you sources of prosperity to which nothing else would have conducted you. Some individuals may besides recollect a period, when they considered themselves as deserted or desolate in the world, and when God raised up those, in the time of need, by whom he sent the most unex-

pected or most substantial comfort to their hearts, concerning all which had befallen them.

But the most important views of affliction which this text ought to suggest to us, are certainly those which represent it as the moral discipline of God; which, with regard to "them who love him," is universally employed in subserviency to their probation for the world to come, and to their eternal salvation by Jesus Christ.

Though the examples, which I have mentioned, frequently occur, it is by no means universally true, that good men always receive worldly advantages as the result of external calamities. There is great variety in the history of Providence, with regard to the affairs of the present life: And the permanent interests of "those who love God," are neither consistent with a continued prosperity, nor permit their prosperity, as often as it is interrupted, to be restored to them: Nor is it always for their ultimate advantage that they should either be relieved from their heaviest afflictions, or should find them compensated in the present world.

On the contrary, it is not only essential to the

ends of God's moral government, that good men should often suffer severely, but that they should sometimes suffer through life; and still more frequently, that the advantages which they reap from the severest calamities, should be entirely confined to their moral effects, and to their last result "at the resurrection of the just."

This is an important view of the subject: And it represents to us the salutary effects of the discipline of God, as clearly, as we discover it in the greatest prosperity which compensates our worst calamities.

I have shewn before, that it is by means of afflictions, suited to their peculiar tempers, that some individuals are introduced into the family of God "according to his purpose;" and that it is by continued trials and vicissitudes, that others are prepared and purified, both for the service which they are required to accomplish in this world, and for "the glory hereafter to be revealed in them."

Our lot in this life is determined by the wisdom of God, and not by our private inclinations. But let those, whose faith and patience have been fully tried, consider dispassionately, with how

much certainty “ they know,” from experience, that the discipline of God “ has wrought effectually for their good.”

Let him look back to his experience, whose mind was first effectually directed to practical Christianity, in the furnace of affliction ; and who was there first of all “ baptized with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.”*

Let those look back, who are conscious that they were saved from the influence of temptations, which had almost destroyed them, by means of severe afflictions which placed their sins fully before them, or which subdued the obstinacy of their tempers ; and who are now able to say, with faith and triumph, from their reflection on the effects of this discipline of God, “ We are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them who believe to the saving of the soul.” †

Let those recollect their experience, who have learned, in the school of affliction, patience, or fortitude, or trust in God ; and who have there re-

* Matth. iii. 11.

† Heb. x. 39.

nounced the passions of the world, "that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith."*

Let those look back, who have risen from the pressure of heavy calamities, better than ever prepared to labour "for the testimony of Jesus Christ," † and "to strengthen their brethren" in the world.

Let "the poor of this world" look back, whom adversities have followed through all their pilgrimage, but "whom God hath chosen to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them who love him." ‡

Let good men, of every class, thus deliberately consult their personal experience; and consider minutely the connection which has subsisted betwixt their worldly condition and their spiritual life; the progress of both, by means of the discipline adapted to their personal duties, or to their peculiar characters; and the relation of the whole series of successive events, which have distinguished their lot, not only to their fidelity in the duties of the present life, but to the probation appointed them for the eternal world: and their

* Ephes. iii. 17.

† Rev. i. 9.

‡ James ii. 5.

experience will universally impress this doctrine on their minds, "that all things work together for their good," according to the gracious intentions of "him who worketh all in all." *

A devout man, who is accustomed to take this minute view of the conduct of Providence to himself, will naturally express his feelings on the subject, in such words as these: "Good in all things is the will of the Lord. I know and feel that it is good and wise." "By the grace of God, I am what I am;" by the blessings which he has multiplied around me; by the discipline which he has chosen for my lot; by the help which he has sent me in the time of need; by the hope with which he has cheered me, when my heart was faint; by the difficulties which he has taught me to surmount; by the afflictions which he has enabled me to bear; by the duties which he has prepared me to fulfil; by the happy impressions which have revived my courage, and gladdened my tabernacle, when "the spirit of the Lord God was upon me." "Good in all things is the will of the Lord."

Comfort yourselves, and comfort one another

* 1 Cor. xii. 6.

with these words. If your observation and your experience united, remind you of the advantages and of the consolations, which have never yet been withheld from “them who love God;” they tell you, not less clearly, where their best resources ought hereafter to be found.

The dominion of God is universal and perpetual: and Christ, to whom “all power in heaven and on earth is given,”* “is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”† “Commit your way,”‡ and “commit the keeping of your souls, to him.”§ He knows you all by your names. “He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”|| He gives to every man the help which is suited to his peculiar duties. He says to every faithful servant in his own place, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”¶ He says to every afflicted disciple, who “takes to himself the armour of God, that he may be able to stand in the evil day,” “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation.”** “To him that overco-

* Matth. xxviii. 18.

† Heb. xiii. 8.

‡ Psalm xxxvii. 5.

§ 1 Peter iv. 19.

|| Heb. iv. 15.

¶ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

** Rev. iii. 10.

meth will I give to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne;” * “and God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes.” †

“ He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” ‡

* Rev. iii. 21.

† Rev. xxi. 4.

‡ Rev. ii. 11.

SERMON X*.

ON

THE GENERAL SPIRIT AND EFFECTS OF
CHRISTIANITY.

LUKE vii. 19, 21. 22.

“ And John calling unto him two of his disciples, sent them unto Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?— And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and of plagues, and evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering, said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.”

I DO not at present enquire, why John the Baptist sent this message to our Lord; or why

* Preached in St Andrew's Church, Edinburgh, before the Directors of the Asylum for the Blind. April 9. 1801.

he sent it at a time when his disciples had just reported to him the miracles which Jesus did, and the general persuasion of the people concerning him, when "they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet was risen among them, and that God had visited his people." * Certainly John could require no confirmation of his own faith, concerning him on whom "the Holy Ghost had descended" before his eyes, in exact conformity to the original sign or intimation given him "by him who sent him to baptise with water;" † and least of all could he require it, after the solemn representation which he himself had given of the progress of our Lord's ministry, now that he heard (as the evangelist in the preceding verses relates) of the reverence and awe, which his preaching and his miracles had spread through all Judea and the adjacent country.

John's message, and the answer which was given him, connected with the peculiar circumstances which attended them, were certainly well calculated to confirm the faith of his disci-

* Luke vii. 16.

† St John i. 33.

ples ; and to give the people in general a striking view of the relation subsisting betwixt his mission and our Lord's ministry, and of the suberviency of the one to the other.

But the chief instruction to which the text ought to direct our attention, arises from this fact,—That it represents to us a great and essential character of the Messiah's reign, described by the prophecies of the Old Testament, and brought directly home to the person and ministry of our Lord ; literally verified by his preaching and by his miracles in Judea ; and afterwards attached, by indelible memorials, to the whole history and progress of the gospel.

This character of the Messiah's reign consists of two important articles ; the relief which Christianity provides for the miserable ; and the general instruction which it spreads among the great mass of the people.

I shall consider it in both these views :

1. As it appeared in the miracles and in the personal ministry of our Lord.
2. As it has followed and distinguished the promulgation of the gospel, from the first age to the present time. And,

3. As it influences or determines the conduct of individual men. Let us attend to it,

I. As it appeared in the miracles and in the personal ministry of our Lord.

The prophecies of the Old Testament contain the most animated descriptions of the effects of the Messiah's reign on the conditions of mankind ; and, in particular, of the power which he was to employ in counteracting the miseries of human life, and in spreading, among all the orders of the people, the light and knowledge on which the true interests and happiness of men depend. "Then," said the prophet Isaiah, "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped ; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." * "The poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel." †

As far as these prophetic descriptions related to the exercise of the Messiah's power in relieving the miseries of the present life, and to his personal ministry on earth, they are directly

* Isaiah xxxv. 5, 6.

† Isaiah xxix. 19.

applied by our Lord, in his answer to John's disciples, to the miracles which he did in Judea, and in particular to those which he did in their presence. They were certainly intended to go farther, and to represent the general spirit and character of the dispensation of the gospel. But, first of all, they were designed to represent the grace and the miraculous powers, which the Messiah was to exercise for the release and consolation of the miserable, in confirmation of his mission and authority from Heaven. "Go, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard." If the miracles done in Judea, and done before your eyes, were described before, as the prophetic characters of the Messiah's power, and as the signals of his reign; then is the Messiah come indeed, and his reign on earth is now begun.

The answer was complete, as addressed to John, whether the facts referred to were considered, as the literal and exact fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, or as miraculous works which demonstrated the power of God to reside in him who performed them.

The great character of the Messiah's reign

described by the prophets, which consisted in the consolation and relief he was to bring to the afflicted and the miserable, is completely ascertained and verified in the person and in the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth. The Messiah of the prophets was "to comfort all who mourned:" And in receiving the answer given them, the disciples of John saw before them "a man like the Son of God," at whose word, "the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised up." The laws of nature and providence were equally subject to him, and yet all his power was employed in mercy for the miserable; "to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to bind up the broken heart." If this was the prophetic character given to the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Messiah predicted, "in whom dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" and those who were permitted to be witnesses of his acts of power and mercy, saw "his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*

* St John i. 14.

As the effects of supernatural power, the miracles of our Lord were demonstrations of his divine character and mission, and affixed the attestation of Heaven to all that he taught and suffered in the world. But as works of mercy and compassion, done for the wretched and the helpless, and done through all the land of Judea, they gave a character to the dispensation of religion which his ministry was to establish, not less peculiar or impressive, than the seal of authority. Every where his miracles were done with the same spirit and design; not more as acts of power, than as mercy and release to suffering men. "He healed all manner of sickness and disease among the people." He brought back to a sound mind him whom Satan had bruised. He restored even the dead to the prayer of sorrow. With all nature and providence at his command, his power was employed as the signal of his compassions. Nothing was done to astonish, and nothing to destroy; nothing to dazzle, or to confound the multitude. All was done in mercy to helpless men, and done as the opportunities naturally occurred. The meanest

of the people said not in vain to him, "Have mercy on me."

It is evident that this character of the whole series of our Lord's miracles*, as the ministry of tenderness and compassion, effectually distinguishes them from all the other miracles recorded in the history of the world, and, as their peculiar feature, must be inseparably affixed to the spirit and design of the dispensation they were intended to confirm.

The temper of our Lord himself is still more peculiar and impressive. It is impossible, without emotion, to contemplate the tenderness with which "he was touched with the feeling of human infirmities:" To observe, how he looked on the multitudes, when they brought him "the lame, the blind, the dumb, the maimed, and he healed them all:"—The sympathy with

* The miracle performed at Cana in Galilee, the permission given to the demons to take possession of the swine, and the withered fig-tree, have been represented as exceptions to this general doctrine. They are not really so. But enough has been said by others on this topic, to render the discussion of it here quite unnecessary.

which he regarded the leper, who said to him, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," when, in mercy, he replied, "I will, be thou clean : " * The kindness with which he addressed the woman of Canaan, who pleaded for the crumbs of the childrens bread ; " O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt : " † The tenderness with which he met the widow of Nain, who followed her only son to the grave ; " When he saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not ; " " he touched the bier," and raised the young man to life, " and delivered him to his mother : " ‡ The peculiar emotions with which he heard that his friend Lazarus was sick and was dead : How he wept with his sisters, Martha and Mary, as they followed him to the grave of their brother ; where, with visible emotion, such as he did not often express, he called him back from the dead, and restored him to his family : § The tenderness and melting affection with which he prayed for his disciples in his agony,

* Matth. viii. 2. 3.

† Matth. xv. 28.

‡ Luke vii. 13, 14, 15.

§ St John xi. 1—46.

and commended them to God: The kindness with which he forgave their infirmity, and the affectionate terms in which he expressed his compassion for them, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak:” * The compassion which he could not withhold even from the servant of his murderers, when he “touched his ear, and healed him,” † at the moment when they led him away to be scourged and to be crucified: The affection with which, from the agonies of his cross, he commended his mother, and the friend whom he loved, to each other’s tenderness and confidence: ‡ And the fervour with which, before he expired, he uttered this prayer for his merciless tormentors, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” §

Certainly “this man was the Son of God.” If the ministry of compassion was to be the signal of the Messiah’s reign, Jesus of Nazareth was the true Messiah, of whom all the prophets had

* Matth. xxvi. 41.

† Luke xxii. 51.

‡ St John xix. 25—27. § Luke xxiii. 34.

spoken; and this was the living character of his reign begun.

But why do we not perceive, that the whole object and design, for which Christianity was promulgated, leads directly to the same point? The Son of God came into this world, “not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them;” * “not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many;” † “to seek, and to save, them who were lost;” to suffer, that God might have mercy on them; to die, that they might live; “to make peace by the blood of his cross;” ‡ “That as sin had reigned unto death, grace might reign by him, through righteousness, unto eternal life.” §

The great object of the gospel is good-will from God to men; mercy from Heaven to sinners of the earth; mercy to many, “by the obedience of one.” And one of its most impressive lessons, to those who embrace it, must therefore be, good-will from man to man; mercy among men, who are deeply indebted to

* Luke ix. 56.

† Matth. xx. 28.

‡ Colos. i. 20.

§ Romans v. 21..

the mercy of God ; mercy to the helpless, and kindness to him who has no friend. “ Love one another,” said our Lord, “ as I have loved you.” * “ I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst ; shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ?” † “ All the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself :” † And who our neighbour is, our Lord has minutely taught us, in his parable of the good Samaritan, who had mercy on the man who fell among the thieves ; and of whom he said to every one who heard him, “ Go thou, and do likewise.” §

A general compassion for the condition of the poor, the helpless, and the afflicted, was then a great and essential character of the Messiah’s reign, as described by the prophecies of the Old Testament, which was exactly verified and exemplified in the miracles, and in the personal ministry of our Lord.

In what I have yet to say, I shall therefore

* St John xv. 12.

† Matth. xviii. 32. 33.

‡ Gallat. v. 14.

§ Luke x. 30—37.

assume it as a fact, that this, which was one of the leading or prominent features of the gospel, when "it began at the first to be spoken by the Lord" himself, was intended by the wisdom of God to become one of its essential and universal characters, in every period of its promulgation.

There is one point, on this part of the subject, which is yet untouched; the general instruction spread among the people by the promulgation of the gospel, during the course of our Lord's personal ministry. The prophet had said, that under the Messiah "the poor among men were to rejoice in the Holy One of Israel;" and our Lord, referring to this prediction, directed the disciples of John to the fact, that "the gospel was preached to the poor;" and certainly intended to hold out this circumstance, as representing a peculiar character of the Christian dispensation.

Our Lord's ministry was, from its commencement to its close, chiefly directed to the great body of the people. He went constantly about, preaching the doctrines which he came to establish. He delivered them publicly in the temple of Jerusa-

lem, in every city, in every synagogue, in every quarter of Judea and Galilee. His manner of teaching was adapted to the understandings and to the conditions of every order of men; and great multitudes followed him wherever he went, astonished at his doctrines, and equally impressed with the awe of his miracles, and with his tender compassion for the miserable. The higher orders of men were no otherwise the objects of his attention, than as they mixed with the multitudes who surrounded him, and sometimes pressed forward to resist his influence among the people, who were “ever attentive to hear him,”* and “who heard him gladly.”† Like no teacher before him, he went with his disciples publicly through all the land, “preaching the kingdom of God,” and was attended by the multitude of every city and district. He sent first the twelve apostles, and afterwards “other seventy disciples,” that, by their separate labours, they might carry on the great design of public teaching among the people through all Judea; and endowed them with miraculous powers, which

* Luke xix. 48.

† Mark xii. 37.

gave a divine authority to their mission. More than this could not then be done, to fulfil the prophetic description of “the gospel preached to the poor;” or of “the poor rejoicing in the Holy One of Israel;” or to verify, in the person of Jesus as the true Messiah, “the Day-spring from on high, giving light to them who sat in darkness,—to guide their feet into the way of peace.”*

This then was the aspect of Christianity among the poor, during the personal ministry of our Lord.

Before I attempt to trace its progress farther, it is necessary to remark, that both the distinguishing characters which I have supposed to belong to it, were at this period almost entirely new to the world, and are not to be found either in the history or in the institutions of the ancient nations.

We are not to suppose men of any age or country to have been destitute of the feelings of humanity, or incapable of exercising them. But those who are acquainted with human nature

* Luke i. 78, 79.

know well, how these may be controuled or perverted, by their superstitions, by their laws, by their inveterate prejudices, or by their general manners.

There were virtues among the ancient nations which we read with a glowing satisfaction, and relate with pride and reverence. But their compassion for the helpless or the sick among the people, the kindness of the great to the poor, their provision for the old, or for the dying, among the lower orders, or their general sympathy with their conditions, were certainly not among their virtues. Setting aside what we find in the history of Judaism, there has not come down to us one trace or vestige of compassion to the miserable, to the sick, or to the dying, among the common ranks of the people, which was sanctioned by the religion, or by the government, or by the institutions, or by the general manners of any ancient nation.

This fact is so well established, that a serious argument has been maintained in modern times, in defence of the ancient system of slavery, founded on the assertion that it held out

to the great body of the people the only effectual security which they possessed, against the miseries of sickness, of famine, and of age*.

If this is in any respect a just view of the preceding ages, it is no wonder that it should be given us as a distinctive character of the Messiah's reign, that, as the great Deliverer and Restorer of our fallen race, he was every where to heal the sick, and gladden the blind, and bind up the broken heart, and "to comfort all that mourn;" and that mercy to the miserable should be represented to be as much a peculiar, as it is a universal, character of the dispensation, over which he presides. †

* Fletcher of Salton's political works, 2d Discourse on the Affairs of Scotland, published in 1698.

We know besides, that, among the Romans, the captives taken in war were made slaves, in order to save them from being put to death; and that from this fact is derived the name "Servi," or "Servati," as explained in the Roman law: a circumstance which equally ascertains the existence and the inveteracy of the practice. "Servi autem ex eo appellati sunt, quod imperatores captivos vendere, ac per hoc servare, nec occidere solent."—*Justinian. Institut. Lib. 1. Tit. 3. § 3.*—*Digest. Lib. 50. Tit. 16. L. 239. § 1.*

† It is a fact of great importance on this subject, that the barbarous policy of reducing to slavery the captives

The instruction of the great mass of the people, was a circumstance not less new or peculiar. The wisdom of the most enlightened nations of antiquity was confined to the schools of their philosophers. Their religion was wrapt up in impenetrable fables and mysteries, which but a

taken in war, was never abandoned, till it was effectually resisted by Christianity. The Christians, from the earliest periods in which they were engaged in wars, gave an example to the heathens, of preserving their captives, both from death and from slavery. They did so, not only without any influence of the governments under which they lived, but, in direct opposition both to inveterate practice, and to the laws which had formerly existed; though they sometimes accepted of a ransom for the captives, whom they allowed to return to their own country. “Sed et Christianis in universum placuit, bello inter ipsos orto, captos Servos non fieri, ita ut vendi possint, ad operas urgeri, et alia pati quæ servorum sunt: Merito sane; quia ab omni caritatis commendatore rectius instituti erant, aut esse debebant, quam ut a miseris hominibus interficiendis abduci nequirent, nisi minoris sævitæ concessione. Atque hoc a majoribus ad posteros pridem transiisse inter eos qui eandem religionem profiterentur scripsit Gregoras (Lib. 4.) nec eorum fuisse proprium qui sub Romano imperio viverent; sed commune cum Thesalis, Illyriis, Triballis, et Bulgaris. Atque ita hoc saltem, quanquam exiguum est, perfecit reverentia Christianæ legis; quod cum Græcis inter se servandum olim diceret Socrates nihil impetraverat.”—*Grotius de Jure Belli et Pacis*, Lib. 3. Cap. 7. Num. 9. § 1.

few individuals were allowed to examine. The knowledge which the people at large were permitted to acquire, was only calculated to rivet on their minds the terrors of the most abject, irrational, and depressing superstitions. While the art of printing was not yet discovered, and the people were effectually excluded from all the means of information, which have become so accessible in modern times, all culture and all real knowledge were of necessity confined to the higher orders of men. The instruction of the people could be no object of attention, and never was attempted. They were universally left to labour and to ignorance.

We may no doubt recollect, that in the free states of Greece and Rome, a certain portion of information was inseparable from the spirit of liberty, and from the effects of the eloquence employed to work on the passions of the multitude, either in public trials or political contentions. But it is not difficult to form an estimate of all the useful knowledge, which can be traced to this source, which, in its best state, had certainly little influence to promote either the virtue or the happiness of the people. And if this kind of information is excepted, which was accessible to

a very inconsiderable number of the human race, the people of the ancient world were effectually excluded from every source of instruction beyond the perceptions or the observations of an uncultivated mind.*

* The following observations of an eminent historian relate directly to this subject.

“ Instead of allowing any ray of that knowledge which illuminated their own minds to reach the people, the philosophers formed a theory to justify their own conduct, and to prevent the darkness of that cloud which hung over the minds of their fellow-men from being ever dispelled. The vulgar and unlearned, they contended, had no right to truth. Doomed by their condition to remain in ignorance, they were to be kept in order by delusion, &c. In confirmation of this, I might quote the doctrine of most of the philosophic sects, and produce the words of almost every eminent Greek and Roman writer. It will be sufficient, however, to lay before my readers, a remarkable passage from Strabo.” &c.—Then follows a long quotation from Strabo, Lib. 1. p. 36. which fully confirms the preceding observations.

The author goes on:—“ These ideas of the philosophers of Europe were precisely the same which the Brahmins had adopted in India, and according to which they regulated their conduct with respect to the great body of the people. Wherever the dominion of false religion is completely established, the body of the people gain nothing by the greatest improvements in knowledge. Their philosophers conceal from them, with the utmost solicitude, the truths which they have discovered, and labour to support that fabric of superstition which it was their duty to have

It was therefore no common attribute of public teaching, that it was given universally to all the orders of human life; and it was, of consequence, a character of the Messiah, as new as it was peculiar, that he preached the gospel to all the people, “to the wise and to the unwise,” to the priests and to the slaves; that he preached it through all the land; and preached it to the lowest of mankind.

There is no doubt, that in Judea itself there was more attention given, both to the relief and the instruction of the people, than can be found in the history of other ancient nations. The Jews were universally trained in the knowledge of their own religion. Its history, its doctrines, its sanctions, its precepts, its rites, and its privileges, were equally open to them all. They were taught by their scriptures, to regard it both as an obligation and as a happiness, “to consider the poor.”* They had all access to hear their law read in their synagogues, and to hear the explanations of it which were regularly gi-

overturned.”—ROBERTSON’S *Historical Disquisition concerning Ancient India*, Appendix, p. 331—334. *passim*.

* Psalm xli. 1.

ven there ; and, at least, a considerable number of them could resort to the schools of the scribes and doctors, who sat in the chair of Moses.

But we must be sensible, that Judea, compared with the rest of the world, comprehended so small a proportion of the human race, that the institutions, which were confined to that district, could have no general effect on the state of the world ; and that even after the Jews were generally spread through the Roman empire, neither their knowledge nor their usages were found to be incorporated with the manners of the Gentile nations.

We ought to consider besides, on the one hand, that the dispensation of the Jews was intended to be the preparation for the gospel, and that it made a part of the same system which was perfected by the Messiah ; and, on the other hand, that the compassion for the miserable, and the general instruction given to the great body of the people, which are impressive characters of our Lord's ministry, go so far beyond the practice and institutions of the Jews, as to leave them completely out of our view ; and, while " the law is regarded as the school to bring us to

Christ,"* present themselves irresistibly to our thoughts, as new and distinctive characters of the last and greatest dispensation.

Let us now observe, as was proposed,

II. How far the relief of the miserable, and the general instruction of the people, given us as the prophetic characters of the Messiah's reign, have followed or distinguished the gospel, from the first age of its promulgation to the present times.

It might well be supposed, that, after our Lord's ascension, the apostles would preserve a strong impression of his miracles, of his public instruction, and of his temper of mind; and that it must have been their first object, to accomplish the end of their apostleship in the same spirit. They were besides inspired by "the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," and all their views and their activity were directed by his influence on their minds. They were endowed with miraculous powers, to be exercised in confirmation of their mission and authority. They healed the sick, they restored the lame, they raised the dead.

* Gallat. iii. 24.

And we must be sensible, that the miracles done by the apostles, and the exercise of miraculous powers, as long as they were permitted in the primitive church, bare the same general and peculiar characters which we have found in the miracles of our Lord, whose name and authority accompanied them. They were universally the pledges and the instruments of mercy to the afflicted, and of kindness to the poor. In this point, therefore, Christianity preserved the peculiarity of its original aspect, during the ministry of the apostles ; and at whatever time the exercise of miraculous powers ceased, continued to make effectual provision for the poor, at least during the first two hundred years of its promulgation ; while it maintained the struggle, in which it prevailed at last, against the superstitions of the heathens, and the persecutions which they excited against the Christians.

The manner in which the care of the poor was regulated among the first believers, deserves our particular attention. After our Lord's ascension, and the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles, when they were commissioned to promulgate the gospel, and establish it " among all

nations, beginning at Jerusalem," they began to give a regular shape and form to the institutions of Christianity, and to the church of Christ: And, next to their principal object, which was to preach the doctrine of salvation and of the remission of sins, by the death and resurrection of the Lord, they turned their first solicitude to the relief of their destitute brethren. From the time when three thousand men were converted, by the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, the care of the poor became a matter of "daily ministration."

At first the contributions of the church were delivered to the apostles themselves, "and distribution was made (by them) to every man according as he had need." * Afterwards, when the number of the believers was greatly increased, and the Grecian converts had murmured against the Hebrews, asserting that their widows had not received their full proportion, the apostles found it necessary (that they might be able "to give themselves entirely to prayer and to the ministry of the word"), to devolve the care of the distribution on "seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom,"

* Acts iv. 35.

who were chosen by the whole multitude of the Christians, and were specially ordained for this service. *

This mode of administration, once established, accompanied the promulgation of the gospel, and, though with such variations as the circumstances of particular cases required, became a settled ordinance in the churches planted by the apostles.

The funds provided arose, among the first converts, from the liberality of the rich, who “sold their goods and possessions,” † that they might effectually enable the apostles to meet the necessities of the poor: “For the multitude of them who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the goods he possessed was his own, but they had all things common.” ‡ Afterwards, when the gospel was spread from Asia to Europe, we find the benevolence of the distant churches united, to supply the wants of the poorer districts: And while this was done, we find an expedient suggested, under the authority of an apostolical advice, which has since been adopted, with great advantage, in the pro-

* Acts vi. 1—6.

† Acts iv. 34, 35, 36, 37.

‡ Acts iv. 32.

gress of the Christian church, by which every one of the believers "laid by him in store, on the first day of the week," whatever he could afford to give, for the relief of the sick, or of the poor, "as God had prospered him."* One other circumstance was added to the benevolence of the faithful, in the care and tenderness of the apostles and of the elders of the church; for it became an essential part of their duty, to visit the sick, and pray with them, comforting and strengthening them "in the name of the Lord."†

I have mentioned these facts minutely, because, excepting what was done among the Jews, they created the first regular institutions for the relief of the poor, which are to be found in the annals of the ancient world; because they represent the means, by which the inspired apostles followed out, what I have shewn to be, a great and essential character affixed by our Lord to the new dispensation; and because they lie at the foundation of all that has ever been done, under the form of religion, or by public institutions, for the relief of the helpless and the poor, in the subsequent ages.

While Christianity silently pervaded the Ro-

* 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

† James v. 14.

man empire, and the Christians were sometimes persecuted, and sometimes allowed to live in peace, the rules laid down by the apostles were generally observed among them ; the union which they preserved among themselves, and their care of the sick and of the poor, rendering them objects of respect, even among those who rejected their faith.

We have many descriptions of the Christian alms-giving from the writers of the first century, who uniformly represent it as an essential part of the character of true believers, and enforce it as an essential duty, from the considerations which Christianity afforded them. And Justin Martyr, who wrote, about the 40th year of the second century, the Apologies for the Gospel, which he presented to the Senate of Rome, and to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, has given us a minute account of the management of the Christian charities at that period, which corresponds exactly with the practice introduced by the apostles. When he is describing the manner in which the Christian worship was celebrated on the first day of the week ; as a part of the service of the Christians on that day, he has given us the following description of

their alms: "The wealthy and charitable," he says, "give, every man according to his own pleasure, whatever they are willing to give. What is thus collected is placed with him who presides in the assembly, and he employs it (either personally, or by the deacons mentioned in the preceding sentence), for the assistance, of orphans and widows, of those who are forsaken on account of disease or for any other cause, of those who are in bonds, of strangers who come from a distance; and, in general, he becomes a curator (or takes on himself the charge) of all who are in want." *

* The whole paragraph deserves to be transcribed, and translated. It is as follows:

Και τη του ήλιου λεγομενη ήμερα, παντων κατα πολεις ή αγρους μενοντων επί το αυτό συνελευσις γινέται, και τα απομνημονευματα των αποσόλων, ή τα συγγραμματα των προφητων αναγινωσκείται μεχρις εγχωρει. εΐτα παυσαμενε τε αναγινωσκόντος, ό προεσως δια λογου την νουθεσιαν και πρόκλησιν τής των καλων τετων μιμησεως ποιείται: επειτα ανισαμεθα κοινή παντες, και εύχας πέμπομεν· και, ως πρόεφημεν, παυσαμενων ήμων της ευχης, αρτος προσφερέται και οίνος και ύδωρ· και ό προεσως ευχας όμοιως και ευχαριστίας όση δύναμις αυτω άναπεμπει, και ό λα-

There is no reason therefore to suppose, that, in this point, the Christian discipline was in any respect changed before the time of Justin; nor

ος επευφημηῖ λεγων το ἀμην. Και ἡ διαδοσις και ἡ μεταληψις απο των εὐχαριστηθέντων ἕκαστω γινεται, και τοις οὖν παρῃσι δια των διακονων πεμπεται. Ὅι ευποροῦντες δε και βουλομενοι, κατα προαιρεσιν εκασος την ἑαυτε, ὀβοῦλεται διδωσι· και το συλλεγομενον παρα τῷ προεσῶτι αποτιθεται, και αυτος επικερει ορφανοις τε και χηραις, και τοις δια νοσον ἢ δι' ἄλλην αιτιαν λειπομενοις, και τοις εν δεσμοις εσι, και τοις παραεπιδημοις εσι ξενοις, και ἀπλως πασι τοις εν χρεια εσι κηδεμων γινεται.

“On the day which is called Sunday, all the inhabitants of the towns, and of the neighbouring country, assemble together in one place. The history of the Acts of the Apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are then read, as long as the time will permit. Next, the reader having ceased, the person presiding, in a discourse, exhorts and admonishes the people to the imitation of those excellent examples. We then all rise up and pray: and, as we have said, when our prayers are ended, bread is brought, and wine, and water (*for the observance of the Lord's supper, explained in the preceding paragraph*). After this, the person presiding offers up the most fervent prayers and thanksgivings; and the people cry out joyfully, saying, Amen. At the same time, there is a distribution and communication made, from the thank-offerings, to every one *who is in need*; and to those who are absent, their portion

have we any ground for believing, that it was materially altered during the course of the three first centuries, or before Christianity was acknowledged by the laws of the empire. Within that period, the gospel had been sent to almost every quarter of the world, which was then known. As early as the end of the second century, Tertullian has told us, that the Christians were even then sufficiently numerous, to have defended themselves effectually against the persecutions excited against them by the heathens, if their religion had permitted them to have recourse to the sword*.

Proceeding on these facts, and supposing the gospel to have carried, as it certainly did, into every assembly where a Christian church was planted, that peculiar character impressed on it by its Author, by which it provided, on the first day of every week, for the afflicted and the poor, and sent the Christians every where “to

is sent by the deacons. But the wealthy and charitable give,” &c.—*Justin. Martyr. Apologia 2da ad Anton. Pium Imperat.* p. 98, 99. *Lutet. Paris.* 1615.

* “Si enim et hostes exertos, non tantum vindices occultos, agere vellemus, deesset nobis vis numerorum et copiarum?”—*Tertullian. Apologet.* cap. 37.

feed the hungry," "to clothe the naked," and to comfort the sick and the mourning:—Supposing the faithful, as numerous as they are stated to have been, constantly put in remembrance of "the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive,"* and "In as much as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me:" † Supposing this, I say, to have been, in general, a true representation of the church, at the period which I am now considering; it is impossible not to perceive, how great the change must have been, which Christianity had then produced, on the circumstances of the world, or how extensive its influence then was, on the conditions of human life,

We are accustomed to see alms-giving generally diffused, even among those who feel no very strong impressions from the Christian doctrine; and are apt to ascribe this circumstance to causes very different from that to which alone it owes its origin. But it is impossible to consider the facts which I have represented, without allowing that Christianity alone brought into the world the

* Acts xx. 35.

† Matth. xxv. 45.

kindness to the poor, and mercy to the helpless, which have universally attended its progress : Or that its effects on the conditions of mankind, by means of this single circumstance, and before it received any sanction from public authority, must have been of the most extensive and impressive kind. It was the Messiah's reign, " the ministry of reconciliation " from heaven to earth, which first effectually inculcated, and spread among the nations, good-will from man to man.

I have no occasion to trace its progress farther ; for, from the time when Christianity became the religion of the empire, public institutions of beneficence were every where established : Institutions to provide for the orphan, for the widow, for the sick, for the dying, and for every description of the poor : Institutions interwoven more with the laws of religion than with the political system of any country ; and manifestly the effects and the result of the doctrines of Christianity on the spirit of nations. The Emperor Julian mentions in a letter to a priest of Galatia, and mentions it as a reproach to the worshippers of his own gods, that " the impious Galileans (for so he termed the Christians), not

only provided for their own poor, but even for the poor of the heathens among whom they lived.”*

* *Sozomeni Hist. Eccles.* lib. v. cap. 16. *Juliani Imperatoris Epistolæ*, edit. Paris. 1630, pag. 204. *Epistola ad Arsacium Pontificem Galatie.*

There is much information with regard to the progress, as well as the corruptions, of beneficent institutions, in “Father Paul’s History of Ecclesiastical Benefices and Revenues.”

In his 2d and 3d chapters, he traces the practice of the primitive church, with regard to the poor; and afterwards the gradual progress and effects of Christian beneficence in the subsequent ages.

“At Rome, where the greatest wealth abounded, the offerings were so large, that about the year 150, they served not only to maintain the clergy and the poor Christians of the city, but to contribute largely to the neighbouring and more remote churches, as well as to the relief of great numbers of Christian captives, in the several provinces, and of such as were condemned to the mines.” Ch. iii. p. 7.

“St John Chrysostom maketh mention, that (in his time, and he died in 407) the church of Antioch fed more than 3000 mouths. It is also certain, that the church of Jerusalem defrayed the expences of an infinite number of people, who resorted thither from all parts. And we find in history, that Atticus, Bishop of Constantinople, assisted the church of Nice in Bithynia, on occasion of a concourse of poor people to that city, wherein were numbered ten thousand in one day.” Ch. vi. p. 16, 17.

It deserves to be added, that in this point the influence of the gospel has been extended even far beyond the bounds of the Christian church.

“ In the Theodosian code, we find a law of Constantine and Julian, bearing date in the year 359, which exempts the trading clergy from paying duties, because all they gained went to the poor. So far were they from dividing the revenues of the church among themselves (as was unhappily too much the practice afterwards), that even their gains they threw into the common stock.” Ch. vii. p. 18, 19.

“ After the eastern and western empires were torn asunder from each other, the government of the churches also took another form. The eastern church kept still the established usage of living in common. But in the western, the Bishops, from being supervisors and administrators of the revenues, began to use them as if they were their own; and to assume a sort of absolute power in their disposition. It was therefore ordered in the western church, about the year 470, that a division should be made into four parts: The first was to go to the Bishop; the second to the rest of the clergy; the third to the fabric of the church (in which, besides that, properly so called, was also comprehended the habitation of the Bishop, of the other clergy, of the sick, and of the widows); and the fourth part went to the poor: which in most churches, according to St Gregory, included only the poor of the place: For hospitality was incumbent only on the Bishop, who was obliged, out of his own share, to lodge all the stranger clergy, and to defray the expences of the poor, who came from abroad.” Ch. vii. p. 17, 18.

The Mahomedan superstition professes to be built on the authority of the gospel: and from this source, it has certainly derived all the charities to the pilgrim, all the care of the poor, and all the compassion for the sick, so conspicuously engrafted on its perverted system; the influence of the gospel being thus employed indirectly, by the wisdom of God, to soften and to ameliorate the conditions of myriads of men, who do not acknowledge the Messiah's reign.

“ All the Fathers who have written before the division was made of the goods of the church into four parts, have agreed that they belonged to the poor; and that the ecclesiastic minister had no other right in them, but to manage, direct, and dispense, according to those necessities. Yet all the ecclesiastics had not the management of the church estates, though they were maintained out of them, as well as the widows, the poor, and other miserable objects: But this care, after the example, left by the apostles, was committed to the deacons, subdeacons, and other economists, who gave account to the Bishop, and in some places to the Presbytry.” Ch. lii. p. 240, 241.—*Father PAUL's History of Eccles. Benefices, &c. translated by M. AMELOT de la Housaie. Westminster, 1727.*

Every thing is abused, which depends on the agency of men. But the effects of Christianity on the condition of the sick and of the poor, were not completely lost, even in the dark ages; and will never be separated from the influence and success of the gospel.

At the same time, it is impossible not to observe, among men professing Christianity, in how many forms even the care of the miserable has been made the instrument of corruption: How often it has been subservient to the worst designs, and to the worst passions of worldly men; and how often the depravity of mankind employs it, to compensate the most flagrant violations of their duties to Christ and to God.

I mention this fact for the sake of remarking, on the one hand, That much practical good has been done in the world by the influence of the gospel, even on those who do not imbibe its spirit, or submit to its authority; and, on the other hand, That the gospel is, in every age, precisely what it was, when it was promulgated by the apostles; and that it universally attains its ends, not only by means of those who sincerely embrace it, but as efficiently, by means of their influence on other men; for the advantage of human life, for the comfort and salvation of those who believe, and for the glory of God by Christ.

On this part of the subject I have still to ob-

serve, That the general instruction given to the great body of the people, and begun by our Lord's ministry, has universally accompanied the mercy to the poor and the afflicted, diffused by the gospel through every land. This was, in fact, the great and peculiar instrument, which Christianity employed for the conversion of the world. Christ sent forth his apostles, to speak to every man in his own tongue, and to address his doctrines universally, without distinction or reserve, to the great mass of the people; to "the Gentile and to the Jew," "to the barbarian, to the Scythian, to the bond, and to the free." Contrary to all the practice which had hitherto prevailed, with regard to the knowledge which was in the world before, "it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching," and of preaching to all the people, "to save them that believe.*"

It is impossible to calculate the effects of the knowledge which was rapidly spread from Judea through all the world. "The people who sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death, saw indeed a great light;" and the knowledge of the

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

doctrine of salvation by the Son of God, was followed by a thousand sources of light and information, from which the people had been effectually excluded in all the preceding ages. Indeed, the effect of the promulgation of Christianity to all orders of men, to disseminate every other species of information, as well as its own peculiar doctrines, and its immediate and general influence on the manners and character of those who embraced it, cannot be either questioned or disguised, by those who have bestowed any attention on the history of the times. The Emperor Julian, who renounced Christianity, and who laboured, with indefatigable zeal, to bring back the people to the ancient superstitions, saw so much of the effects of the Christian discipline, and of the regular instruction given by the ministers of the gospel to the great body of the people, that, with a view to give the same advantages to the heathen superstitions, he proposed a form of discipline, a system of public instruction, and even an institution for alms, after the model of the Christian churches, to be adopted and incorporated in the temples of idolatry*. No con-

* Sozomeni Hist. Eccles. lib. 5. cap. 16.; Juliani Opera,

sequences followed from this design ; for before the experiment could be tried, the Emperor's death put an end to all his frenzy. The fact, however, is a demonstration from the mouth of an enemy, of the power and success, with which Christianity was seen to have spread a general light and knowledge among the people.

The corruptions in the Christian church, which were imperceptibly multiplied, till they at last produced the monstrous usurpations of the Church of Rome, gave the first great check to the general information, which Christianity had diffused. After the people were no longer permitted to read the Scriptures, and were confined to a worship performed in an unknown tongue, the human understanding was soon in worse fetters, than it had ever worn ; and the ignorance and barbarism of the dark ages followed.

On the other hand, it is a fact equally certain, that the reformation and revival of the Christian church in the sixteenth century, was the signal of light and knowledge returning to the world.

p. 529, 530. ; where many circumstances are stated which plainly allude to the same things, though without any direct mention of the Christian institutions.

The general knowledge of the Scriptures diffused among the people,—the zealous and enlightened exhortations of the first reformers,—the art of printing, begun at this critical time,—the books which the Reformation produced and circulated,—created a new æra in the history of the world; and spread, more than ever, the sources of substantial information through every country.

We have been more indebted for the superior light of modern times, and for the modern improvements in every art and science, to the influence of Christianity, and to the means of information which it has created; to the effects of its doctrines, of its spirit, and of its progress; than to all other causes whatsoever. “The gospel, preached to the poor,” has added much indeed, to the resources, both of the rich and of the wise; and has done so, by preserving in its progress, the same general and peculiar characters, with which it was, at first promulgated by Christ and his apostles.

The facts which I have stated under this head, are of great importance in themselves; and, I trust, they will at least be thought sufficient to establish the general conclusion, for the sake

of which I have produced them, to wit, that the relief of the miserable, and the general instruction of the poor, essential and peculiar characters of the Messiah's reign, as described by the prophets, and which were exactly verified in the miracles and in the personal ministry of our Lord, have followed and distinguished the promulgation of the gospel, in every age; and are attached, by indisputable facts, to its whole history and progress.

There is yet one branch of the subject remaining. I proposed to consider,

III. The peculiar character, which I have illustrated as belonging to the Messiah's reign, as it influences or determines the conduct of individual men.

The effects of Christianity, on the condition of the world, are universally produced, by means of its influence on the characters of individuals. But, as I have already stated, they are the result of its influence on those who do not believe, as well as of its energy among those who sincerely embrace it.

It is perfectly obvious, that no man sincerely receives the gospel for his own salvation, to

whom it does not become a settled and determinate object through life, to assist the helpless, to comfort the sick, “to give alms of such things as he has;” and, within his own sphere, to do his utmost for the promulgation of the gospel, and for the general instruction and edification of the people. With all the variety of means and talents, by which our conditions are diversified, every man can do something in his own place, to follow out the spirit of Christianity in these points, for the glory of God, and for the advantage of human life. What cannot be done by superior talents, may be often promoted by means of wealth; and, where wealth has not been given, by means of good sense, of private influence, of zealous endeavours, of personal virtues, or of prayers to God. From the beginning of the gospel to the present hour, we must suppose every good man to have laboured in this service, though with more and less success, and even with more and less fidelity, according to the degree of his faith and ardour, of his good sense and patience. We must suppose the multitude of true believers, in all ages and countries, to have

laboured earnestly, separately or together, to bring home, by their personal exertions, the peculiar mercy of the gospel to the afflicted, and its light and salvation to the poor. We must suppose, from the promises and from the grace of God, notwithstanding all the corruption of the world, that the effect of their labours, in the spirit of their Master, has at all times been considerable, to render the Messiah's reign, what it professes to be, The universal blessing of heaven to men; a light to enlighten the nations, and "comfort to them who mourn;" as well as "salvation to the ends of the earth."

The more attentively we consider the history of individual believers, we see so much the more of the perpetual effect of their labours, to ameliorate the conditions of human life, and to bring home to the circumstances of all orders of men, the peculiar characters of the gospel, which I have attempted to illustrate. "Ye are the light of the world,"* said our Lord, "and ye are the salt of the earth." †

* Matth. v. 14. † Matth. v. 13.

But I have affirmed, that the influence of Christianity is far from having been confined, in any age, to the personal labours of the individuals who have sincerely embraced it. Much has also been done, by means of their influence on other men; and by means of the general spirit, especially with regard to the points before us, which the gospel has spread through the world.

On the one hand, charity to the poor, and compassion for the sick, the relief of helpless men, and a general inclination to ameliorate their conditions, the assistance to be given to the institutions of beneficence, the means to be employed for the purposes of public instruction or reformation, and the disposition among men of the most opposite characters to promote them, have become virtues of humanity, independent of religion. Much good has every where been done, where the direct influence of Christianity on individual men has been small indeed; much good, which, after the facts are considered, which I have brought, from the condition of the ancient world, and from the history and progress of Christianity, must, in good sense and reason, be exclusively imputed to the effects of the pecu-

liar character of the gospel, on the general temper and conditions of mankind. We may allow ourselves to believe, that we find the beneficence of unprincipled men, and the beneficence of unbelievers, in the laws and sympathies of human nature. But we shall not be able to shew, that they have ever been either generally or extensively realised, except where the gospel has gone before to prepare the way.

On the other hand, it is equally true, that there are multitudes of men, far removed, in their personal conduct, from the spirit of real Christianity, who have adopted the virtues of charity to the sick, to the youth, and to the poor, as if they comprised the substance of all practical duty and religion. By the misinterpretation of a text, which they have learned from their youth to pervert; a text which says, that "charity shall cover the multitude of sins;" * a text, which, in its true meaning, relates, not to charity or alms, but to the kindness or partial affection, which leads us to forget, or to cover, the faults of those whom we love: By

* 1 Peter iv. 8. Prov. x. 12.

the misinterpretation of this text, and by other considerations which they have adopted, with as little thought or reflection, they allow themselves to believe, in contradiction to the whole object and design of the gospel, that works of beneficence will be accepted, at the tribunal of God, in place of personal godliness; or will be sufficient to compensate, not only the neglect or violation of many duties, but the commission of many positive and deliberate sins, in their personal conduct.

I cannot at present lay open either the folly or the mischiefs, which this kind of persuasion has spread through the world; though I admonish you in the name of the Lord, that the doctrine which is employed to sooth or to encourage it, is of the most pernicious tendency; and that it is charity of the best kind, to undeceive men on a subject, which is of equal importance to their present duties, and to all their eternal interests.

But I have mentioned this fact, as another demonstration of the influence of Christianity, by means of individuals who do not sincerely embrace it, to accomplish its ends in the world; and in particular, to render even them the in-

struments of mercy to the miserable, and of instruction to the poor.

If the particulars, which I have stated, shall be combined, I trust they will be found to establish one general and important doctrine, to wit, that relief to the miserable, and the general instruction of the poor, essential characters of the Messiah's reign, as described by the prophets, were leading and peculiar features of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it was promulgated by himself and his apostles; that they have universally followed its progress, through all the ages and countries which it has hitherto reached; and that, as well by means of those who have not believed, as of those who have sincerely embraced it, they have universally produced the most extensive and salutary effects, on the conditions of human life.

There cannot be stronger considerations urged from experience, to persuade us, that the gospel will reach the latest ages, with the same living and peculiar characters; and that every successions and generation of men, among whom it shall in any degree attain its ends, must expe-

rience its efficacy by means of the same kind. "Christ is set for salvation to the ends of the earth," and to the latest ages: and wherever the habitations of men are found, the "Sun of Righteousness shall at last arise, with healing in his wings."*

Can we have stronger motives, than these considerations afford us, to relieve the sick, to comfort the mourners, and to send instruction to the poor? Even those who do not believe, are the instruments of God in the world; and they have at least the satisfaction to think, that the good which they do, is not useless, notwithstanding the corrupt sources from which it springs.

But if we are indeed in earnest in embracing the gospel, for our own salvation, and for the service of God, both in this world, and in the world to come, it is certain, that we cannot employ our talents or our ardour, with too much solicitude, to relieve the miseries of our fellow-creatures, or to promote their comfort and salvation. "Our labour is not in vain in the

* Malachi iv. 2.

Lord." It will not be lost to those for whose advantage we labour, or lost, as "the testimony of Jesus" in the world; "and in due time we shall reap, if we faint not." "I was hungry," said our Lord, "and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. For inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

Ye have at this moment before you one description of helpless men, who plead powerfully to engage your compassion;—a description of men, who, when the gospel began to be spoken by the Lord, never cried in vain, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on us."

Blind by the hand of God, and, left to themselves, completely helpless, they are here to be trained, by your assistance, to industry and comfort among their brethren. The institution for their benefit, new in this country, has hitherto prospered by the blessing of God; and its ad-

* Matth. xxv. 35. 36. 40.

vantages have exceeded the expectations which were formed of it.

I commend them to your kindness,—to the sympathy of your hearts,—to the help of the rich,—to the blessing of the liberal hand,—to the faithful and tried beneficence of good men, “who know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “The blessing of them who were ready to perish comes” not in vain upon the earth. “He who hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, will he pay him again.”*

* Prov. xix. 17.

SERMON XI.

ON THE UNIVERSAL PROMULGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

MATTHEW XXIV. 14.

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come.”

THERE are two subjects mixed together in this chapter, which, to be well understood, must be precisely distinguished. It begins with our Lord’s prediction, concerning the destruction of the Jewish temple ; an event naturally involved in the destruction of Jerusalem, which is represented in the concluding part of the preceding chapter. The twelve disciples, with all the prejudices of Jews, regarded the destruction of

Jerusalem, and the end of the world, as events which were to happen together; not being, even at this time, sufficiently enlightened in the doctrine of their Master, to understand the temporary and subordinate design of the Jewish dispensation.

In putting the question to our Lord, concerning the time when his prediction was to be accomplished, they applied it indiscriminately to both these events, “When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”*

Without correcting their mistake in explicit terms, our Lord gives them a variety of signs, by which they might know with certainty the approach of the predicted destruction of Jerusalem. But these he intermixes indirectly, with such intimations concerning “the end of the world,” as were sufficient, when his doctrines should be better understood, to ascertain the period of this great event, as not only entirely distinct from the destruction of the Jewish city and temple, but as far more remote.

One of the chief circumstances, which belongs

* Matth. xxiv. 3.

exclusively to the signs, with which he connects "the end of the world," is contained in this text, and relates to the universal promulgation of the gospel, before "the end shall come." "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

This declaration, given us by the Author of the gospel himself, is of as much importance to the present age, as it was to the age of the apostles: and will naturally lead us to consider the following points of doctrine, which cannot be uninteresting to those, who derive their consolations from the gospel.

It supposes,

1. That Christianity was not designed to become at once universal; and that its universal promulgation was intended to be the work of ages.
2. That the gospel must "be preached in all the world," before "the end shall come."
3. That, whatever degree of success or of neglect may attend it, the gospel is designed to serve, among all nations, "as a witness," or as a testimony, from God to men. And,

4. That, after the gospel shall be effectually promulgated to every nation under heaven, "then shall the end come," or, the final dissolution of the world.

I shall, in this discourse, confine my attention to the first and second of these views of the text.

We are incompetent judges of the government of God ; and almost every different view of it presents to us difficulties, which are beyond the sphere of our limited understandings. If we can only ascertain the facts, which are interesting to ourselves, and the practical consequences of them, which are to influence our conduct, we ought to be satisfied with the information afforded us ; though we must be sensible, that there is a great variety both of facts and appearances, which are above our reach.

With this impression on our minds, let us consider,

I. That Christianity, according to the language of this text, was not designed to become at once universal ; and that its universal promulgation was intended to be the work of ages.

I use the term *universal* in its most comprehensive sense. For it is evident, that the general promulgation of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles, began immediately after the day of Pentecost which followed our Lord's resurrection; and that, after the first dispersion of the primitive believers, it was gradually spread, by their means, and by the labours of the apostles, through all the provinces of the Roman empire. It is also plain, that our Lord could not mean to say, that the gospel was to become absolutely universal at first, when he connected the universality of its promulgation with "the end of the world;" and that he must have intended to affirm, that, by whatever gradations its progress was to be carried on, its ultimate universality was certain, though it was to be the work of time.

The success of the gospel in the apostolic age, when it is connected with the circumstances which accompanied it, is beyond all doubt the most unexampled fact in the history of the world. By means of a few friendless men, all of them, but one, taken from the lowest and most illiterate orders of their country; with all the

powers of the world against them, and their own countrymen their inveterate persecutors; with no weapons but the force of truth, and the miracles which they did in the name of the Lord; the gospel made its way, and, most commonly, by a silent and imperceptible progress, from province to province, and from one city to another, till, without any external help or protection, and amidst a succession of many persecutions, the churches of Christ were planted in almost every district of the Roman empire; and even beyond the limits of the empire, both in Africa and in Asia. It overwhelmed every idolatry in its progress; establishing itself, in opposition, both to the prejudices, and to the persecutions by which it was resisted.

In as far as Christianity could prove its authority by its progress, the evidence was complete, during the course of the first age; and could never be either destroyed or diminished by subsequent events.

On the other hand, it is equally plain, that there has been no age or period, since its first promulgation, when the gospel might not have been carried farther than it was carried: when

there were not nations "who sat in darkness," whom "the Day-spring from on high had never visited:" And when the means of more extensive promulgation were not the objects of devout exertions, or solicitude; among true believers.

A multitude of nations, scattered over the face of the earth, have, in every age of the Christian church, down to the present time, been without the knowledge of Christ. In mentioning this fact, I do not refer to the countries which have been deprived of the advantages of the gospel, after having been once in possession of them; for this case will afterwards occur to us. But I refer to the variety of tribes, who, living in barbarous, inhospitable, uncultivated, or idolatrous countries, have never possessed the advantage of the true revelation of God, beyond the tradition of their fathers; and who have never been enlightened by the doctrine of salvation by Christ.

It is an unquestionable fact, that the promulgation of the gospel has not yet been universal; and that much is yet to be done, before it can become so.

It must be equally plain, that it could not

have been the design of our Lord, that Christianity should be at first universally promulgated. The same power, by means of the same kind, could have sent it, with as much certainty, to “the utmost ends of the earth,” as from Judea to Rome. It appears clearly to have been his intention, that its promulgation should be so rapid and extensive, as not only to render its establishment secure; but, as a public and undeniable pledge of the power of God, which accompanied it, to go far beyond every similar event. More than this was not effected; and therefore we are bound to believe, that more than this, was not designed by him. The promulgation of Christianity to every people, and to every corner of the world, was, in the wisdom of God, intended to be gradual and progressive; the work of many successive ages; “the labour of love,” among many successions of believers.

The knowledge of the Scriptures, and even the doctrines of Christianity, may have penetrated into many countries, by means, of which no history in our possession has preserved the memorials: And there are strong reasons for this

supposition to be found, in the known usages, and in the peculiar idolatries, of many of the heathen tribes. But no doubt can exist of the general fact, that the promulgation has not yet been universal; however incapable we are to speculate on the difficulties, which may be supposed to be involved in it; or to fathom the counsels of infinite wisdom, into which no human understanding penetrates.

It is not our province to understand, why the gospel has been withheld from any nation of the world, or why any habitation of men has been permitted to remain, longer than another, “the region and shadow of death;” why, in some countries, successive generations are without “the knowledge of salvation;” while “the sun of righteousness arises,” for ages, on the nations around them, “with healing under his wings.” But it is not more difficult to explain these facts, which are undeniably certain, than to shew, why four thousand years, in the history of fallen men, were expired, before the Son of God came down from heaven, “to seek and to save that which was lost;” or why the advantages of revelation were enjoyed for so long a period in the land of

Judea, while the inhabitants of every other country were universally debased by ignorance and idolatry : Why the most precious medicines remain unknown to many successive generations of men ; and, after they are discovered, can be communicated but to a small proportion of the human race, to whom they might be useful. Or, in equal circumstances, to shew, why one man is wiser, or happier, or has better talents, or more prosperity, than his neighbour. These facts are all on the same level, with respect to their ultimate cause ; and must be resolved into the unsearchable counsels of God. They are not subjects of inquiry fit for our condition ; and the solution of them is certainly beyond the sphere of our duties.

But, without knowing more than the facts, we ought to find in the gradual and successive progress of the dispensations of God, the most interesting and forcible instruction. We ought to learn, on the one hand, that it is no argument against the authority of the gospel, that it has not yet been universally promulgated ; because, down to the present period, this was not the design or intention of its Author. We ought to ob-

serve, on the other hand, that the continued progress of the gospel, and its success, wherever it is sent, according to the declared purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a continued demonstration of its divine authority, and of the power of God which accompanies it. We ought to perceive, besides, the perpetual obligation of the believers of the gospel in every age, to become "fellow-workers together with God," in promoting the interests of vital Christianity, within their own sphere, and in embracing the best opportunities afforded them, to assist its gradual influence and progress, or to send it to those, to whom it is not yet promulgated.

Let us now attend to the circumstances, from which we affirm,

II. That the gospel must be universally promulgated, before "the end shall come."

It is the leading design of the text to make this assertion, in order to discriminate the signals, which are to announce "the end of the world," from the signs, which were to go before the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem. The universal promulgation of Christianity is represented as an event, which is certainly to happen; or as an event, to which we are to look

forward with confidence, before “the end shall come.”

The certainty of this event is laid down, both in the Old and in the New Testament, in plain and definite language, from the time when the promise was made to Abraham, that “in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed,”* to the period, when the canon of Scripture was closed, by the last revelation given by our Lord to his servant John, when he addressed him in these striking and solemn words: “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last:—Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” † Our Lord sends forth his disciples at first, “to teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;” ‡ and this commission has the same authority, among the believers of succeeding ages, which it had among the twelve apostles, till “the end shall come.” The gospel is constantly in its progress to the nations, which it has not reached; and something has been done, in every age,

* Gen. xxii. 18. † Rev. i. 11. 19.

‡ Matth. xxviii. 19.

to promote or to extend its promulgation. The miraculous works, to which much of its first success is to be attributed, are no longer promised, or to be expected. But the ordinary operation of second causes, sanctified by the spirit of Christ, is destined to be as effectual in promoting the same ends, in the order, and at the times, "appointed by the Father." The progress of knowledge, of arts, of commerce, and of general intercourse, contributes, with more and less success, and with more and less advantage, to carry the knowledge of Christianity from age to age; to plant it where it was not before; or to pave the way, in the course of Providence, for its final triumphs over every idolatry. The passions and the ambition of the world are made the instruments, to accomplish the purpose of God. That which men have meditated for the purposes of rapacity, or to gratify the worst of worldly passions, he not seldom converts into the means of diffusing, to "the nations which sat in darkness," "the light which enlightens the Gentiles," and "the salvation," which is destined for "the ends of the earth."

Even in those cases, in which the gospel has

reached the heathen nations, unhappily incorporated with the corruptions which have disfigured or perverted it, though its progress is retarded by this unhallowed mixture, it is not lost. Though those who embrace it, under such disadvantages, want much, both of the means and of the information, requisite to shew them "the way of God perfectly," that portion of "the good seed" which is sown among them, notwithstanding "the tares" which are intermixed with it, "brings forth its fruit in its season." It keeps its hold of the soil where it is first scattered, till better instruments of culture are provided, or till a clearer sun arises; and "the sons of God are gathered," though "the light" which directs them "shineth," for a time, "in a dark place." *

By the discovery of unknown countries, and the extension of commerce and of the arts to the most remote, the way is gradually opened for the promised universality of the Christian doctrine; and those are made to contribute to it effectually, who have it least in their minds to become the instruments of its progress. God

* 2 Peter i. 19.

stirs up men of different views and characters, and men possessing all the variety of talents and endowments, to assist the progress of his designs, or to pave the way for their final accomplishment. The most promising appearances are often unsuccessful. But "that which is sown in weakness, is also sometimes raised in power;" and "that which is done in a corner, is at last proclaimed on the house tops." We are not qualified beforehand to form an estimate of the means employed, or of the effects which they are ultimately to produce. The weakest are sometimes the most successful instruments; and the means, which are apparently best suited to the end, are often found by trial to have been least adapted to it. But the progress of Christianity to its universal promulgation is notwithstanding steadily carried on, in the course of Providence; and, however imperceptible it may be at any one moment of time, it is both visible and distinctly marked, from one period to another. If it sometimes seems to be lost in the blindness, the sensuality, or the perverseness of the world, the course of events as often demonstrates, that the barriers which have been permitted for a

time to be raised against it, are the instruments which the wisdom of God had destined "to revive his work," or to send "the great salvation" of "the latter days," farther than ever among the nations.

The gospel loses its hold of a degenerate, unbelieving, and unprincipled people, who have fallen from the hope of their fathers. But the strength of the kingdom of God is not lost, by their perversion or impenitence. Christianity becomes the glory and salvation of another people; "rising as the day-spring from on high, to guide their feet into the way of peace;" or as "a cloud ascending like a man's hand from the sea," which gathers and spreads, till it covers the face of the distant lands. It accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent to one people, and collects from all their tribes the children of God. It is then "sent far from them among the Gentiles;" and thus the universal promulgation predicted, is constantly advancing, though not by the rules which the wisdom of men would prescribe, according to the original intention of God, "which he purposed in Christ Jesus, before the world began."

Without being more minute, with regard to the means or the instruments employed, I think the circumstances which I have mentioned sufficient to explain the general doctrine, that “the gospel of the kingdom of God,” or the spiritual dominion of Christ, is in its constant progress through the world; appearing in very different aspects where it has once been established; but gradually extending itself from one people to another; and constantly in its progress, till, “in the fulness of time,” its universality shall be completely attained.

We are incompetent judges of the success which attends it at any one period; and much more, of the permanent effects to be expected, either from the means employed, or from the first appearances in any country. But all the experience of the past ages, as well as the observation of our own times, accords with our faith in the ultimate universality of the kingdom of Christ.

Besides the gradual progress of the gospel from one nation to another, by means of which we believe that it will at last reach every district of the world, there is another idea of its univer-

sal establishment, before “the end shall come,” of which strong presumptions arise, from the language of the prophetic scriptures. From them we are led to conclude, that it will not only be ultimately promulgated in every corner of the habitable world, and in one age or another to every tribe of human beings ; but that a period will at last come, when the profession of Christianity shall literally become universal on the earth ; when it shall be found in every nation of the world at the same time, and among every kindred of men ; when Jews and Gentiles shall be equally united in professing the faith of the gospel ; when “there shall be but one fold and one Shepherd ;” and when every false religion, and every idolatry, shall be overwhelmed, or extirpated by the kingdom of Christ. “There was given him (the Messiah) says the prophet Daniel, dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people and nations, and languages, should serve him ; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed ;” * but which shall be-

* Daniel vii. 14.

come the last condition of the habitable world.—
“The God of Heaven shall set up a kingdom
which shall never be destroyed; and the king-
dom shall not be left to other people; but it
shall break in pieces and consume all the other
kingdoms; and it shall stand for ever.” †—
“And the kingdom and dominion, and the
greatness of the kingdom, under the whole
Heaven, shall be given to the people of the
saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an
everlasting kingdom; and all dominions shall
serve and obey him.” ‡

Our Lord's assertion, in the text, is in precise
correspondence with these antient predictions,
and is a simple and impressive explanation of
them. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be
preached in all the world, for a witness to all
nations, and then” (as if Christianity among
the nations completed the designs of Provi-
dence on the earth) “then shall the end come.”

In whatever sense this language of the pro-
phesies is to be interpreted, whether as relating

† Daniel ii. 44.

‡ Daniel vii. 27.

to the successive diffusion of the Christian doctrine over every district of the world, or to the profession of the faith of the gospel by every nation of men at the same time, there can be no doubt that it was the intention of the prophets to affirm, that in one or other of these views of the subject, or in both of them united, "the gospel of the kingdom" of Christ will become universal on the earth, before the dissolution of the world approaches. ✓

The views of the subject, which I have now stated, naturally suggested by the text, serve to explain the conduct of Providence, with regard to the progress of Christianity from age to age, and the limited success which, in different ages and countries, has hitherto attended it; while they ought to teach us to look forward, with faith and confidence, to the certainty of its final and universal promulgation.

There are other circumstances, of great importance in the history of the gospel, to which the text also directs us. Its influence on the condition of individuals, and on the state of the world, from its first publication to the pre-

sent time, opens to us a wide field of instruction. I shall turn your thoughts to this branch of the subject, in another discourse, though it is far too extensive to be minutely illustrated.

SERMON XII.

ON

THE UNIVERSAL PROMULGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

MATTHEW XXIV. 14.

“ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come.”

THE history of Christianity comprehends a most important branch of the conduct of Providence to the human race: And the different views of it which this text suggests to us, serve equally to establish the truth of the gospel, and to illustrate its practical effects among mankind.

The points which I proposed to consider, in discoursing on this text, are these following:

I. That Christianity was not designed to be

at once universal; and that its universal promulgation was intended to be the work of ages.

2. That the gospel must "be preached in all the world," before "the end shall come."

3. That, whatever degree of success or of neglect may attend it, the gospel is designed to serve among all nations, as a "witness," or as a testimony, "from God to men." And,

4. That, after the gospel shall be effectually promulgated to every nation under Heaven, "then shall the end come," or, the final dissolution of the world.

The first and second of these propositions have been illustrated in a former discourse: And I am now to consider, what the text affirms,

III. That the gospel "is preached to all nations, for a witness," or for a testimony, from God to men.

The meaning of the assertion is obviously this, That, whether the gospel is believed or is rejected, the circumstances, which attend its progress, are in every country permanent monuments, both of the importance and of the authority of its doctrine.

Christianity is, in all the nations to whom it is sent, “ a witness,” or a demonstration, of the facts which are attested by its progress, and of the effects which are the result of its influence. Its history, fully understood, presents, in a variety of aspects, to the believers of successive generations, the evidence, as well as the essential characters, of the faith they have embraced ; its continued triumphs, both over the wisdom and the depravity of the world ; the successive pledges which one age transmits to another, that the kingdom of Christ is established, and is in its progress through the earth, and that “ the gates of hell shall not prevail against it ;” as well as the practical demonstrations of the wisdom of God, displayed in the means, adapted to different times, by which the sons of God are gathered from every land.

I have already referred to the circumstances, which distinguished the first promulgation of Christianity. Within forty years after the death of Christ, it was received by a great proportion of Jews and Gentiles, in opposition to all their prejudices as depraved men, as well as to every national and religious prejudice. It had no as-

sistance from the governments, or from the philosophy, of the world ; but subjected those who embraced it to every degree of scorn and persecution. The means of its promulgation were not, in their own nature, adapted to the ends for which they were employed : on the contrary, they appear to have been chosen, for this precise reason, that, possessing no natural fitness for securing the success to which they were subservient, it might be impossible to ascribe the progress of the gospel to its visible means or instruments, or to any other causes than the energy of truth and the power of God.*

It will not be easy to shew, that real Christianity has ever been effectually promoted, by means dissimilar to those which were at first employed. After the first age, its progress certainly assumed a new aspect. It had no longer the advantage of the repetition of the miracles, which were wrought by the apostles and their disciples ; and, after the lapse of three hundred years, it received the countenance of the civil governments.

* See Dr Campbell's Sermon on 1 Cor. i. 25.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied, that, since that time, means have been often employed to assist its progress, which have little affinity with the instruments which were originally selected. The bigotry and ambition of men have attempted to spread Christianity, by means to which it has no relation; sometimes by deceit and imposture, and sometimes even by force of arms. But every intelligent man must be conscious, that no visible or permanent success has ever been the result of means so foreign to the design of the gospel; and that even the protection of the civil authorities has assisted its progress, only by the facility which it has created, of communicating with every description of the people, and by means of the order and tranquillity, in which the Christian institutions have been permitted to operate.

The enemies of Christianity are in all ages the same; the ambition, the sensuality, the vices, and the superstitions of the world; and its real success in any age, in opposition to them, is only to be ascribed to the same means, by which it was originally promulgated; to the miracles done at first in the name of the Lord;

to "the foolishness of preaching, by which it has pleased God to save them that believe;" to the visible accomplishment of the ancient prophecies, in the history of the gospel; to the simple modes of instruction, of which Christ and his apostles gave the example, or the pattern; and to the influence of the spirit of Christ on the minds of men.

The continued efficacy of these means, if they are effectual, is, like "the spirit of prophecy," "the testimony of Jesus;" a witness in every age, both to believers and to those who do not believe, "that God hath made him both Lord and Christ."

Every fact which attests the progress of Christianity in the world, by means, in their own nature so little adapted to the end, as those which Christ has blessed, and which bear so little analogy to the instruments by which any other faith has ever been supported, is a practical demonstration of its original authority. It is "a witness," or a decisive proof, "to all nations," of the soundness of the counsel which Gamaliel gave at first to the Jews, and of the result of the experience, by which Gamaliel affirmed

that Christianity ought to be fairly tried. "If this work were of men, it would long since have come to nothing," carried on by no other instruments than those which it employs; and, as far as experience can ascertain its authority, we have also a right to conclude, that "men cannot overthrow it," and that, wherever they have made the attempt, "they have been found even to fight against God." *

Success is certainly, by itself, no decisive proof of the authority of any doctrine; for falsehood and imposture have often been successful in the history of the world. But success by external means, of which we know both the influence and the extent, and which bear no proportion whatever to the effects produced, may not only be safely, but is of necessity referred to a superior agency. If "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual," and are notwithstanding effectual, against both the force and the malignity of "the rulers of the darkness of this world," we have certainly the best reasons to conclude, that "they are mighty through God;"

* Acts v. 38, 39.

and that, down to the present period, Christianity is proved to be "the work" of heaven.

The effects which the gospel has produced on the general condition of mankind, in every country in which it has been planted, forms no inconsiderable part of its testimony "to all nations." This is a view of the subject, of which every well-informed man ought to be a competent judge.

Without taking into our consideration the influence of Christianity on those who sincerely receive it, we cannot but perceive the extensive effects which, either by their means, or by means of its general spirit and tendency, it has universally produced on the condition of those who do not believe; on their characters, their usages, their manners, and their opinions.

It is impossible not to admit the importance of the light and information which Christianity has brought into the world, to which we are chiefly indebted, not only for our release from the most pernicious superstitions, but for our best sources of knowledge, with regard to the true interests and obligations of men. Every man, who has any knowledge of the history of the world,

must perceive the diffusion of principles and of morals among the great mass of the people, which was never attempted with any general effect before the promulgation of the gospel: The influence of the gospel, to attach infamy to the gross vices, which were almost universal before the Christian æra: The liberal views and characters, with regard to one another, which the western nations have derived from the public profession of the same faith, which, before the propagation of Christianity, were completely unknown: while the world was yet divided betwixt Jews, or Greeks, or Romans, and the barbarous people of every other tribe: And finally, the influence of Christianity, well or ill understood, to enlarge the sphere of active men, and to open the communication of the remotest nations, so as to create sources of wealth and of general prosperity, unknown to the former ages.

These facts it is impossible to deny: and candid men, though they are not believers, will find it difficult indeed, to explain them by causes, with which the influence of Christianity is not inseparably interwoven.

It is obvious that the public laws and institutions, which are derived from the authority or from the spirit of the gospel, have an effect on the conditions of men and on their general character, quite independent of personal religion. It is equally certain, that the doctrines of Christianity have an influence in regulating the opinions, in restraining the vices, and in softening the manners of mankind, not only when they do not produce such habitual convictions as can render men "wise unto salvation," but even when, as the doctrines of religion, they are deliberately discredited and rejected. There is a character for intellectual acquisitions, for liberal science, for commercial enterprise, for general urbanity, and for the virtues of domestic life, in which none of the nations of antiquity, and not one description of Mahometans or of modern idolaters, can bear to be compared with the inhabitants of Christendom. Individuals of every age and country have surmounted every national disadvantage. But the general spirit of nations is not to be mistaken. Without forgetting either the arts or the philosophy of Greece and Rome, we

must perceive, that there is an extent of general information, a strength of understanding and of character, united to an order and a refinement in private manners, which notwithstanding all the depravity of modern times, form the peculiar distinction of the countries in which Christianity is planted. Men, who take no serious interest in the ultimate design of the gospel as the doctrine of eternal life, are imperceptibly partakers of the advantages, which its progress has universally spread through the world.

It is not pretended that the effects of the gospel on general manners are either in the same degree, or of the same extent, in every country in which Christianity is established. On the contrary, its influence is very different, according to the circumstances which have attended its progress. But it is affirmed with confidence, that in every country in which Christianity is permanently established, its peculiar effects are so visibly distinguished in the usages and in the general character of the people, as to raise them far above every nation of men, civilized or barbarous, in which either the delu-

sions of Mahomed, or any forms of Pagan superstition prevail. If there are any exceptions to this fact, they can only be found in situations, in which, with the name of Christians, nations have preserved all their original ignorance or superstitions.*

The influence of the spirit of Christianity on the state of every district of the world in which it is planted, is thus its perpetual "witness" or testimony "to all nations." It ameliorates both the conditions and the characters of men, even when it does not reach their consciences: And though it is published "for salvation to the ends of the earth," it demonstrates its energy even to those "who count themselves unworthy of everlasting life."

On this part of the subject I ought to add, that independent of the effects produced by the spirit of the gospel, the manners of those who sincerely embrace Christianity must have great influence on the situations of mankind.

* See Dr White's Sermons at the Bampton-Lecture, Ser. ix. in which this subject is discussed with equal minuteness and ability.

The sincere believers of Christianity are in every country mixed with the general mass of the people. Amidst all the variety of their capacities and activity, the influence of their personal characters is imperceptibly diffused among those with whom they live and act, and, more remotely, even among those, with whom they have never been associated, to whom the effects of their conduct can extend. The personal virtues and the good examples of “a multitude which no man can number,” scattered among all the tribes of men who profess Christianity, must be admitted to have a perpetual tendency to ameliorate the condition of the world, to check the progress of corruption, to restrain the wickedness of the wicked, to prevent many effects of the vices which prevail, and, “like the salt of the earth,” to preserve to successive generations that which is good or useful in their own times. The good works of a single man, enlightened by knowledge, and inspired by an habitual zeal for the glory of God and the happiness of his fellow-creatures, diffuse their influence widely around him during his own life; and, by means of those whom he has been the instrument of training, or assisting, or reclaim-

ing, extend their effects to those who come after him, long after he "has been gathered to his fathers;" and in many instances, even to remote countries, and to distant ages.

If we believe this to be a fact, we must have enlarged conceptions indeed, of the effects produced by the real believers of the gospel on the general state of the world, on the order and happiness of human life, and even on the characters and satisfactions of men "who do not obey the gospel of God;" and who do not perceive the advantages, for which they are themselves indebted to Christianity.

The gospel "is preached" and believed for a witness to all nations;" and, by means of those who sincerely embrace it, its testimony is universally the same in every district of the earth, to wit, that "they are the salt of the earth," that "they are the light of the world," and that "their light shines before men," even when men do not "glorify their Father who is heaven."

There is yet another view of the testimony of the gospel. The doctrines which it promulgates for the renovation of the world, come home to the consciences of individuals; and the

impressions which they produce, or the convictions of duty or of sin which they awaken, are a permanent witness and memorial, both of their importance and of their authority, among all the nations to whom Christ is preached.

The doctrines of Christ are the most interesting truths, to which the understanding of man can be applied. We learn from him the laws and history of Providence, with a degree of energy and precision, with which our unassisted faculties would not enable us to discern them on the face of external nature ; while the solemn truths, to which the gospel bears its peculiar testimony, involve the greatest interests of the human race : All, which it imports a sinful being to know, believe, or do ; all, which concerns our redemption from misery and sin, and our everlasting welfare ; all, which can either comfort us in our fallen state, or instruct us concerning our hope in God, or direct us with regard to our present duties, or our peculiar temptations, or establish our faith in “ the mercy of God to pardon,” or, “ in his grace to help us.”

The testimony of the gospel must be different, according to the effects which it produces on different men.

It is an awful "witness for the truth of God," to those who harden their hearts against it; a testimony written in blood, that "God sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world," and that they would neither hear nor obey him; "a witness" against them, through time and eternity, that mercy came down from heaven, and that they hardened themselves the more; that, "according to the determinate purpose" and grace of God, the Son of God shed his blood for the redemption of the world, and that "they have counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing;" that with all the advantage of the light of the gospel, and of its impressive warnings and admonitions; with a full consciousness of the grace which it promulgates to a sinful world, and of the hope by which it would persuade them, they persist in impenitence and unbelief, while "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin;" that they have many strong internal convictions of the authority of the gospel, and of their personal danger in resisting it, and

yet allow themselves to persevere deliberately in vice, “treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath.”

The gospel is an awful “witness to the nations,” when these are the truths to which it affixes the seal. Its testimony in every age and country is the same, concerning every hardened and impenitent unbeliever. It warns him of his danger, but it calls him to repentance. It tells him of the mercy of God through the blood of atonement, and of “the sanctification of the Holy Ghost;” and it beseeches him to the end, to repent and to believe, that “he may not perish.” But it must be a decisive “witness” against him before God and men, if he shall live and die in impenitence.

How dreadful is this testimony of the gospel, as it relates to the present and to the last condition of individuals! How awful, as it represents the determined infatuation of the multitude of sinners! “God set forth his Son to be the propitiation through faith in his blood,” that he might raise us from the ruins of the fall, and save us from the perdition of sin and death; and “they have trodden under foot the Son of God,

and do despite unto the spirit of grace.”—
“Christ suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God;” to rouse us “to fly from the wrath to come, and to bring home to our conviction the bitterness and the guilt of sin;” and this is the condemnation,” written against the unbelievers of every nation, as if there were no other source of condemnation besides, “that light is come into the world, and that they have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” †

But the testimony of the gospel, in its most awful forms, is not unaccompanied with the most earnest and affectionate admonitions; and its admonitions are expressed in such words as these: “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing come forth from the presence of the Lord.”* “Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.” † “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not

† St John iii. 19.

* Acts iii. 19.

† St John i. 29.

perish, but might have everlasting life.” † “Take his yoke upon you, and learn of him ; for he is meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” § “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him.” || “Now is the accepted time ; behold now is the day of salvation.” *

The testimony of Christianity is rendered complete, by the effects which it produces on the condition of the individuals who sincerely embrace it.

By whomsoever the gospel is despised, they who believe and obey it “have the witness in themselves,” that “it is spirit and life.” A good man, who sincerely applies Christianity to its practical ends, has a proof within himself, both of its energy and of its authority, of which nothing can deprive him. It enlightens his mind ; it subdues his passions ; it settles the tumult of contrary affections, and fixes his heart where his permanent interests are ; it purifies and ennobles

† St John iii. 16.

§ Matth. xi. 29.

|| James i. 5.

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

the motives of his conduct ; it effectually regulates and determines his pursuits ; it preserves him amidst the strongest temptations, for it raises him above them ; it teaches him how to enjoy the comforts of this life, and not only how to bear, but how to receive advantages from its afflictions ; it forms his character among mankind, while it combines his interests with the happiness of the sons of God. Men in the lowest departments of human life, without literature, and without either wealth or distinction in this world, have the full consciousness of these practical effects of the gospel, in common with the wisest of those who embrace it. To every man who is indeed a Christian, the energy, and therefore the authority, of Christianity, is proved, by his personal experience of its influence on his happiness and on his character, “ through the sanctification of the spirit, and the belief of the truth.” He is fully persuaded, by what he knows and feels, that “ the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power ;” that it is “ righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ;” “ holiness to the Lord,” and fidelity to men ;

“ the wisdom and the power of God unto salvation to every one who believeth.”

The faith which governs a man's life, by means of principles from which he derives his best consolations, and by expectations which enable him to surmount both the fears and the real calamities of this world, is not to be shaken by the sophistry of scepticism, and much less by the delusions of practical infidelity. Vital Christianity, which, by means of active holiness, “ adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things,” has the proof, or “ the witness” in itself, among all nations. “ I know,” said an apostle, “ in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him :” * “ I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” † “ This gospel of the kingdom,” will a true believer say, “ is preached in all the world for a witness ;” and I have the evidence within my own mind,

* 2 Tim. i. 12.

† Gallat. ii. 20.

that it is not preached in vain. All that to which it bears testimony among the nations is verified to my conviction, and confirmed by my personal experience. I am conscious of its present efficacy; and I look with desire, and with a full persuasion, to its final result in the kingdom of God. But my first concern, in the mean time, is this, that I may be honoured to contribute something to “the testimony of the Lord” in the world; or that I may be enabled to do something which may serve as an example “to them, who shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting;” or which shall assist the progress, or which shall prove the efficacy, of those unalterable truths, in which the present and eternal interests of men are involved; to wit, that “Christ is mighty to save;” * that “there is no salvation in any other;” † that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord;” ‡ that our “heavenly Father will give the holy spirit to them that ask him;” § and that “the peace of God passeth all

* Isaiah lxiii. 1.

† Acts iv. 12.

‡ Heb. xii. 14.

§ Luke xi. 13.

understanding, and keeps the heart and mind through Christ Jesus." *

When we take this view of the influence of Christianity on the minds of those who sincerely embrace it ; and consider it in connection with the testimony, which it impresses on the consciences even of those who reject its authority ; we must have a strong conviction both of the reality and of the extent of the effects, produced by the promulgation of the gospel, in every country to which it is sent.

Every where it attains its ends. " The children of God are gathered" from all the nations, and have the proof within themselves, that they are born from on high ; " not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God ;" † " not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." ‡

On the other hand, when the gospel fails in persuading men, or in converting them, besides its external effects in restraining their depravity,

* Philip. iv. 7.

† St John i. 13.

‡ 1 Peter i, 23.

and in ameliorating their conditions, it is a monument of the truth and faithfulness of God, to render them without excuse, who have obstinately hardened themselves against its authority. The men of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrha, "shall rise at last in judgment" against the unbelievers of Judea: And "the Gentiles, who have not the law" or the gospel, but "who do by nature the things contained in the law," "shall rise in judgment" against every man to whom the gospel has been preached in vain. His advantages will only serve to aggravate his final condemnation; while the merciful Redeemer of the world will recognise the publican of Judea, and the heathen man among the Gentiles, "on whose heart the work of God's law was written," as men "not far from the kingdom of heaven."

There is a circumstance intimately connected with the universality of the gospel, and manifestly written on its history, which ought not to be omitted, in illustrating the doctrine of this text.

We know that, in a country in which the gospel was once planted successfully, and in which many believers have for a time rejoiced in it,

by the perversion or depravity of their successors, it may at first be disfigured, and at last be lost. In the righteous judgment of God, it may be sent from them to the inhabitants of another country. Among these, too, it may at last be corrupted by similar means, till they also have lost its advantages, by the visitation of God.

Of these facts, the primitive churches of Judea, and the seven churches of Asia, are by no means singular examples. The history of Christianity presents us with a multitude of facts of the same kind; and the striking, though gradual, declension of the most flourishing Christian churches, both in respect of zeal and of morals, is a perpetual confirmation of them.

We are not permitted to unravel the mysteries of Providence; nor is it necessary that we should be able to account for events, which we know to be subservient to the ends of God's universal government. But it is of real importance to us, that we should not be perverted by means of false conclusions, deduced from facts which are established by experience.

Does Christianity lose its aim, in the countries from which it is taken away? It collects in its

progress “the children of God.” It “seeks and finds them,” wherever they dwell. They are widely scattered; but the doctrine of salvation reaches every one of them in his place. When unbelievers harden their hearts, and become more and more obstinate in “rejecting the counsel of God;” when “the measure of their iniquity is full,” and “the love of many (among those who profess to believe) waxeth cold;” the gospel ceases at length to strive with them, and its light and glory arise on another land.

But, even in this case, Christianity was not promulgated in vain. “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed;”^{*} and their number far exceeds our most sanguine expectations; while the effects of their faith are not lost among their children, even after they no longer enjoy the advantages of their fathers.

The hardened suffer the effects of their impenitence and perversion. But “the gospel has free course and is glorified;” and every where believers are found to follow its progress. The universa-

* Acts xiii. 48.

lity of its promulgation is not affected, because it is taken away from a degenerate and perverted people. It was sent to them; and it accomplishes among them the end for which it is published, in as far as it is a testimony for the truth of God, both to the believers, and to those who will not believe.

Finally, "the gospel of the kingdom of God" is destined for every land, "for a witness to all nations;" though "it is not for us to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."* The great fact we know with certainty; that the testimony of the gospel will be at last complete; that whatever the series or the progress of its promulgation is, "Christ is set for salvation to the ends of the earth;" that "this gospel must be preached in all the world;" for judgment to those who will not receive it, but for "life and peace" to those who believe, "of every kindred and people and nation and language."

I have still to consider,

IV. That after the gospel shall have been ef-

* Acts i. 7.

fectually promulgated to every nation under heaven, “ then shall the end come ;” or, “ the final dissolution of the world.”

I have remarked, in the preceding discourse, that though our Lord is admonishing his disciples, in the chapter from which this text is taken, of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, he intermixes with this subject intimations with regard to the final dissolution of the world, which were designed for every age of Christianity. Such a combination of different subjects, to which similar descriptions are applied, is by no means unusual in the prophetical Scriptures.

I have illustrated the language of the text, as relating exclusively, and in its literal sense, to “the end of the world.” I consider this as the just interpretation of every part of the language of this chapter, which cannot, in its full meaning, be applied to the final subversion of the Jewish state, or to the destruction of Jerusalem. It is scarcely conceivable that any such event, or any event of less magnitude than the dissolution of the world, can be connected with the following description : “ The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. The stars shall

fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken : And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven ; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory : And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”* This description follows a very striking view, which our Lord had given of the circumstances which were to accompany the destruction of the Jewish state ; and it is introduced by the expression “immediately after the tribulation of those days,” which is manifestly designed to mark the distinction between the calamities of the Jews, and the last signals of the dissolution of the world. Whatever precise signification we affix to the words translated “immediately after,” they ascertain this fact, that the description which they are employed to introduce, does not relate to the events which are before represented, and which evi-

* Matth. xxiv. 29—31.

dently refer to the destruction of Jerusalem: And though, in their natural signification, they convey the idea of future events, at no great distance, the same phraseology is very commonly applied in the New Testament to “the end of the world,” to represent not only the certainty of this awful event, but the importance of immediate preparation for “the judgment of the great day,” which, at the remotest period of time, will find every individual man in the same condition, in which his spirit leaves its mortal tabernacle. “The night is far spent,” says the apostle Paul to the Romans, “the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light:” * And to the Philippians, “Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand.” † The apostle Peter expresses the same thing still more precisely: “the end of all things is at hand: Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” ‡ The same phraseology is used in all these examples, which our Lord employs to represent “the end of the world” as

* Rom. xiii. 12. † Philip. iv. 5.

‡ 1 Peter iv. 7.

“immediately after” the tribulation produced by the destruction of Jerusalem.

It is obvious besides, that our Lord’s assertion, that “of the day and hour (of which he spake) knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, (and as he expresses it in the parallel text of the gospel of Mark, neither the Son) but the Father only,” * can only be applied to the time fixed for “the end of the world.” It is, at least, much more natural to suppose, that this was really a subject of which he was then discoursing, than that such an assertion was introduced, merely on account of its connection with a remote allusion, employed to represent the certainty of the destruction of Jerusalem : † or that it was, in any sense, intended to apply to this event, which our Lord had explicitly affirm-

* Matth. xxiv. 36. Mark xiii. 32.

† This some commentators have affirmed ; supposing our Lord’s assertion to refer to no other part of his discourse, than to the allusion immediately preceding it ; Matth. xxiv. 35. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

ed, was to happen, before the extinction of “the generation of men then alive.”*

That “the end of the world” was really his subject, as well as the calamities of the Jews, is moreover clearly established, by the striking admonitions found in the conclusion of this chapter, which are far more applicable to our preparation for the last coming of the Lord from heaven, than to any other event; and which are manifestly and strictly connected with the subject of the following chapter, which, all must admit, relates entirely to the transactions of the last day, and to the general judgment. †

Adopting this interpretation, ‡ I suppose the

* Matth xxiv. 34.

† Matth. xxiv. 42--51. Matth. xxv.

‡ Bishop Butler, in his Sermon on this text, which he understands in the same sense in which the author has taken it, does not even make the supposition that another interpretation could be given. Calvin and many other expositors have adopted the same interpretation.

Other commentators have no doubt applied the text exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem, though (as the author thinks) without sufficient authority.

universal promulgation of Christianity to be given us, as one of the latest signals to be expected of the final dissolution of the world.

This part of the subject does not admit of minute illustrations. We rely on the assertion of the gospel with regard to "the end of the world," without being ignorant, that unbelievers, in every age of the church of Christ, are willing to adopt the language, ascribed by the apostle Peter to the men of the first age; "saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were."* We believe that "the end will certainly come," - at the time "appointed by the Father;" and that the events, which are to go before it, will happen in succession, at the periods, and in the order, represented to us in the prophetic Scriptures. We know, too, that there will be unbelievers in the last days, whose obstinacy will not be overcome, till the general conflagration shall overwhelm them.

The universal promulgation of the gospel is

* 2 Peter iii. 4.

to be regarded as the signal to prepare for the dissolution of the world.

When the gospel shall have fully attained its purpose; when the kingdom of Christ shall have established its triumph over every superstition and idolatry; when the multitude of believers shall be complete, collected from all the tribes of Jews and Gentiles; when all the Scripture shall be fulfilled concerning the Messiah's reign on earth, and "all his enemies shall be put under his feet;" * when the testimony of the gospel shall have been given to all nations, according to the true intention of its Author; and when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea;" † "then shall the end come." "The Son of man shall then come, in the glory of his Father, with his angels." ‡ "He shall send his angels—to gather his elect from one end of heaven to the other." || "The dead in Christ shall rise first;" § but "all that are in

* 1 Cor. xv. 25.

† Isaiah xi. 9.

‡ Matth. xvi. 27.

|| Matth. xxiv. 31.

§ 1 Thes. iv. 16,

their graves shall hear his voice.”* “The dead shall then be judged,” “small and great.” † “The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and with everlasting joy upon their heads.” ‡ “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations who forget God.”

“Then shall the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Then shall all these things be dissolved.” § The dispensations of God on earth shall then be closed for ever. “The Son shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all.” ¶

“Amen.” “Hallelujah!” “For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” || The redemption of man will then be complete. “Death and hell shall then be cast into the lake of fire.”** The everlasting song shall then begin among the

* St John v. 28.

† Rev. xx. 12.

‡ Isaiah xxxv. 10.

§ 2 Peter iii. 10. 11.

¶ 1 Cor. xv. 24. 28.

|| Rev. xix. 6.

** Rev. xx. 14.

sons of God : “ Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, to Him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.” *

* Rev. v. 13.

SERMON XIII.

PROSPECTS OF FUTURITY.

MATTHEW XXVI. 29.

“ I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

THIS text was originally addressed by our Lord to his disciples, on the night which immediately preceded his death. It is expressed in metaphorical language, and was evidently designed to prepare them for the prospect of an immediate separation from him, by directing their expectations to a state of things, far more perfect than any which they had yet experienced, for which that event was to pave the way.

It might refer to the time, when the dispensation of the gospel (which the New Testament often calls "the kingdom of God") was to be completely established. It makes a part of our Lord's discourse to his disciples, when he instituted the holy ordinance of "the Lord's supper;" and, when connected with the events which that solemnity was designed to commemorate, might refer to the time subsequent to his death, resurrection, and ascension, when his disciples "were to be all filled with the Holy Ghost," and "to be endowed with power from on high." On this supposition, "the kingdom of the Father" would signify the dominion of Christ on earth, which was to be effectually established by the mission of the apostles, to preach the gospel to all nations; and the powers and gifts, with which they were to be inspired, would be represented by "the new wine" of the kingdom of God.

This interpretation receives some countenance from the parallel text in the gospel of Luke, which is not only connected with "the Lord's supper," but with the feast of the passover, celebrated at the same time: an institution, which typically represented the events which "the

Lord's supper" was intended to commemorate, testifying before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow:" "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Our Lord then "took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come." *

From the language and the arrangement of this representation, there is at least some plausibility in supposing, that the events, "to be fulfilled in the kingdom of God," were those which the passover prefigured, and that "the kingdom of God" is therefore a general expression, to signify the effectual establishment of the dominion of Christ on earth, by the dispensation of the gospel.

This interpretation would no doubt suggest to us a very important assertion, announced at a time, when it was calculated to make a strong impression on those whom our Lord addressed;

* Luke xxii. 15---18.

an assertion with regard to the ultimate success, and permanent consolations of the gospel, in which the sincere believers of Christianity will always feel themselves to be deeply interested. But I am persuaded, that the idea, which our Lord intended at this time to convey to his disciples, goes far beyond it.

I think that “the kingdom of my Father,”* “my Father’s house,”† “the kingdom of our Father,”‡ are expressions which the New Testament employs to signify, exclusively, the kingdom of God in heaven, to be established at the restitution of all things, “when the Son shall have delivered the kingdom to the Father;”§ or, that state of future happiness and perfection in the invisible world, in which the dominion of God will be complete and universal; and which those, who believe and obey the gospel, will at last enjoy together.

On that night in which the last scene of his sufferings began, our Lord expressed the utmost solicitude to comfort his disciples in the view of

* St Matth. xxvi. 29.

† St John xiv. 2.

‡ St Matth. xiii. 43.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 24.

their approaching separation from him, by considerations adapted to their state of mind; and in particular, by holding out to them the assurance that their separation from him was not to be perpetual, and by giving them the direct prospect of being again restored to his society. He spake of his glorious exaltation in the everlasting kingdom of the Father, and of the time when they were to be united to him again. He represented to them, with earnestness and affection, the happy state of being, in which they were again to enjoy his personal presence; and in which their intercourse with him, more perfect than it had ever been, was to last through eternal ages. : "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you: And if I go and prepare a place for you; I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."* He expressed the same idea in the pathetic intercession addres-

* St John xiv. 1, 2, 3.

sed to his Father, with which his discourses on this solemn night were concluded. "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do: And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was;" * adding, what this part of his prayer sufficiently explains, "Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: For thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." † It is in correspondence with the whole spirit and structure of these animated expressions, that I suppose the text to have been intended by our Lord, to comfort his disciples with regard to their separation from him, by conveying to them, along with the intimation of his death, a direct and positive assurance, that they were to rejoin him "in his Father's kingdom," and that there, their intercourse with him would be certain and perpetual. "I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day,

* St John xvii. 4, 5.

† St John xvii. 24.

when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

If this is a just view of the text, its application to our conditions, and the consolations which it may suggest to us, are both obvious and striking.

We enjoy many satisfactions together in the present life. But the time for possessing them is short; and no individual knows, with regard to himself, how short it is. We are certain, that nothing which we possess is permanent, which cannot be referred, either by its effects or by its result, to the world to come. And we believe, that there is a state of being, after this life, in which all that is good and pure will be at last united; in which every good man will find his place among his kindred spirits; in which Christ "shall be glorified in his saints;" and in which "God shall be all in all." If we can believe, that our Lord's address to his disciples in the text can, in any event, be directed to ourselves, we ought to derive from this persuasion, the most animating and soothing impressions, of which a good man can at any time be conscious.

I shall, in discoursing on the text, consider it, in the three following lights :

1. It reminds those who believe and obey the gospel, of the confidence and persuasion, with which they are warranted to look forward to the everlasting "kingdom of the Father."

2. It reminds them, that though they must soon relinquish whatever they possess in this world, there is a time approaching, when their best satisfactions shall be both revived and perfected. And,

3. It reminds them, that though the time of their departure from this world should be near, when they must sleep in the dust of the earth, they are certain that their spirits will not die ; and that they shall awake "to glory and to an endless life" in "the kingdom of the Father."

Let us consider,

I. That our Lord's declaration in this text, if we suppose that it can be in any circumstances directed to us, ought to remind us of the confidence and persuasion, with which we are warranted to look forward to the everlasting "kingdom of the Father."

“ The kingdom of the Father ” conveys to us the idea of a state of existence beyond this life, which good men will at last enjoy together, in which the dominion of God and of goodness will be complete and universal ; in which pure and faithful men will be associated with the highest order of created beings ; in which the powers and virtues of every individual will both attain their utmost progressive perfection, and receive their full reward ; in which every human faculty will be fully occupied, and applied to its proper objects ; in which every man will serve God in his own place, with an enlightened mind, and a perpetual ardour ; in which every individual will find his kindred spirits, and dwell with them in everlasting purity and love ; in which, though their capacities may even then be different, every man’s happiness will be complete, and every man’s cup will be full ; and in which, whatever they possess will last for ever, or will attain a new or encreasing perfection, through eternal ages. This is “ the kingdom of the Father.”

But there is an important fact to be added to this representation. The Son of God will be

there, “in his own glory,”* and “in the glory of his father,” † “He who liveth, and was dead, and who is alive for evermore,” ‡ “He who hath redeemed us to God by his blood,” §— He who, when he left his disciples in the world, referred them to the day, when “they were to be with him where he is,” when “he was to drink with them new wine in the kingdom of his father.” He shall be there, with all who are his; with “the multitude which no man can number,” “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, who shall stand before the throne, and before the Lamb.” ¶ Their intercourse with him shall be the tender and endearing intercourse of love. He shall there apportion to every one of them his proper office, and his full employment. He shall place every one of them among his fellows; and shall give to every individual his peculiar joy. He shall present them all, in the presence of his father, pure and happy, “kings and priests,” ** and “Sons of God.”

* Luke ix. 26.

† Matth. xvi. 27.

‡ Rev. i. 18.

§ Rev. v. 9.

¶ Rev. vii. 9.

** Rev. v. 10.

This is the reign of Christ and of the saints, in “the kingdom which cannot be moved.” † There nothing shall ever rise to resist the dominion of God, or to awaken, among those who shall inherit everlasting life, one painful or cheerless recollection.

It is delightful to mortal creatures, to be able to look with desire to “the kingdom of the Father.” It is far more delightful, to be able to live in the present world, under a full persuasion, that there is such a condition of human beings approaching, to which we are warranted to aspire, and which is certain as the faithfulness of God; under a persuasion, that there is such a perfection of mind, and such an extent of moral and intellectual faculties, which every individual man may at last attain; and that there is such a glorious society preparing among the Sons of God, and such “a fulness of joy,” which is to succeed our pilgrimage on earth, and which we are to possess together through the ages of eternity.

The hope of this blessed state, as “the anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast,” ‡ is enough

† Heb. xii. 28.

‡ Heb. vi. 19.

to compensate every sorrow of the present life ; all its infirmities and disappointments ; the utmost injustice and malignity of the world ; the afflictions which have most embittered our spirits ; and even the melancholy experience which convinces us, that in this world there is nothing either permanent or sure.

It revives and invigorates the soul of man, to look forward, with full persuasion and confidence, beyond the shifting and clouded scenes of mortality, to their final result and end in "the kingdom of the father : " To the pure and permanent happiness which we are taught to expect, as the ultimate effects of the vicissitudes and the discipline experienced in the present life : To the mansions of perpetual joy, "set before us" to sustain our courage, while we dwell in tabernacles of clay : To our final association with "the spirits of just men made perfect," who have already overcome the sorrows which they experienced in the flesh, and who are now, with "the innumerable company of angels," before "the presence of the Father : " To the last triumphs of death and sin, of which the Son of God assures us, who was himself "made

perfect through sufferings,"* and who now says to us from heaven, that "if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him," and that, "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him:" † To our participation of the glory of the great day, when "the end shall come; when the Son shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father, after he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power;" ‡ when we shall derive our happiness from our perpetual union and subjection to "the king eternal, immortal, and invisible;" § and when our voice shall be heard among "the hosts of heaven," who "fall down and worship God who sits upon the throne, saying, Amen, Allelujah,—for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." ¶

"If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." || "Believing we rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glo-

* Heb. ii. 10.

† 2d Tim. ii. 11. 12.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 24.

§ 1 Tim. i. 17.

¶ Rev. xix. 4. 6.

|| Rom. viii. 25.

ry.” * We shall be happy indeed, when even our sufferings and our struggles shall be forgotten in our joy. Who shall be able to think of sorrows, which return no more, when every man shall be placed in his own sphere, in possession, not only of the full extent, but of the complete effect, of his faculties in their most animated state; associated with the purest spirits in the intelligent creation, and destined to glorify the God of Heaven through eternal ages?

Do not these prospects of “the Father’s kingdom,” and the certainty with which they are announced to us, suggest the strongest considerations to influence our present conduct, and to excite our ardour in our present duties? Do we not perceive, that it ought to be the first object of solicitude to every human being, “to work out his salvation,” and to make it sure: To allow nothing in the present life, nothing in the temper of his mind, nothing in his pursuits or in his affections, to deprive him of the high hopes which are given him beyond the grave?

* 1 Peter i. 8.

Do we not feel the obligation impressed on our consciences, “to live by the faith of the Son of God,” and “to keep ourselves unspotted from the world;” To be faithful, to the utmost extent of our capacities, “in that which is committed to us;” and to consider every thing, which can ever be attached to our present conditions, as subordinate and subservient to our permanent interests in “the kingdom which cannot be moved?”

It is humbling and awful to know, that there are intelligent men, who take their portion in the present world, as the only source of their happiness or solicitude, and who aspire after nothing in the kingdom of God: human creatures, who banish immortality and heaven from their thoughts, and deliberately barter, for the fleeting pleasures or pursuits of this transitory life, every expectation beyond it.

There cannot be a more dreadful reflection awakened in the human mind, than that which certainly awaits these unhappy men, “except they repent;” that the hope of immortality and of salvation by Jesus Christ, was once held out to them, and held out to them in vain. Their pre-

sent state of mind is a melancholy anticipation of the final result of their conduct. "The God of this world," says the apostle Paul, "hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."* Deliberate imperitence confirms their habits, till at last, "being past feeling, they give themselves"† up to a reprobate mind, "lest they should see with their eyes, or hear with their ears, or understand with their hearts, or be converted, or be healed."‡ They take to themselves the license of a worldly mind; but "their glory is in their shame;"§ and "they know not what they do."

We cannot take this view of human characters without deep regret and solicitude. But, on the other hand, it is equally interesting and consolatory, to contemplate the prospects of those, who hear not the gospel in vain, "whom the God of hope hath filled with all peace and joy in believing," and who, amidst all the infir-

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

† Ephes. iv. 19.

‡ Matth. xiii. 17.

§ Philip. iii. 19.

mities of the present life, “abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”*

Their interest in “the kingdom of God” equally determines their personal conduct, and regulates their views of the present life. “They are saved by hope.”† They live for the world which lasts for ever. “They go from strength to strength; till every one of them appears in Zion before God.”‡ Their faith every day penetrates farther “within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered.”§ It sheds light and peace around all their lot. It sustains their courage through life and death. It enables them to become to one another the instruments of mutual animation and fortitude, during their pilgrimage together: And it impresses this conviction deeply on their minds, that their interests in the kingdom of God are permanent and certain; that all their hope will be at last realised; that “their labour is not in vain in the Lord;”|| and that “in due season, they shall reap, if they faint not.”¶

* Rom. xv. 13. † Rom. viii. 24.

‡ Psalm lxxxiv. 7. § Heb. vi. 19. 20.

¶ Cor. xv. 58. || Galat. vi. 9.

Let us consider,

II. That this text reminds those who believe the gospel, that, though they must soon relinquish every thing which they possess in the present world, there is a time approaching, when their best satisfactions shall be both revived and perfected.

This idea is naturally suggested to us, if we suppose that our Lord intended to admonish his disciples, that they were no longer to have access to the intimate and personal intercourse with him which they had hitherto enjoyed, till they should follow him through death into the invisible world, and be reunited to him in his Father's kingdom. Conscious of the happiness which he had given them, and which they had enjoyed in common, from the time when they became his disciples, it was impossible for them, in receiving this intimation, to resist the impressions of sorrow. It was impossible, above all, for "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and who at that moment "leaned on his bosom,"* not to be melted by the tenderest recollections, when

* St John xiii. 23.

he heard from him these solemn words: "I say unto you, I will not henceforth drink of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

The situation of our Lord's disciples gives us a striking view of our circumstances in the present world. There is nothing in our possession, which we shall not be required to relinquish, whatever our regrets may be, or the pressure on our strongest affections. The moment when we think our satisfactions at their height, or when we are preparing to enjoy them in tranquillity, is not seldom found to have given the signal of happiness departing: of happiness departing, to return no more, in this vale of mortality and change.

The recollection of past enjoyments, which are no longer in our possession, cannot but be interesting. It will always awaken our strongest feelings, to remember those who have loved us, who now sleep in the dust; the companions of our youth, or the friends of our age; our parents, whom we revered as our first benefactors; or our children, whom we loved with the tenderest affections; those who once knew our

hearts as they were, whom we see no more. It is impossible to consider, without emotion, how much we were once interested in those whom we remember with these impressions ; or how much real happiness they either contributed to impart to us, or were permitted to participate in our society.

Such a recollection is not to be resisted : The recollection of satisfactions, endeared to us, by their relation to our most important duties, and to our best affections.

The happiness which we derive, even from the acts of religion, or from good works, is as far from being uniformly the same, as any other legitimate source of our enjoyments in this world : And a time must at last come, when even this we can no longer possess, as we have once possessed it. The source of our communion with God is permanent, though our capacity for enjoying it, in the present life, has its appointed limits, and must of necessity be often exhausted. But when we are conscious, that our ardour is no more what it was, we look back with melancholy reflections, on the delight which we could once receive from the prayer of faith, the

labour of love, or the patience of hope, while God answered us in the joy of our hearts; and are too often in danger of pursuing these reflections beyond their proper limits.

The consolation, which Christianity opposes to all such recollections or regrets, is founded on this important fact, that there is a future state of being, in which every enjoyment worthy of our rational nature will be revived and perfected; or, in the language of this text, will be refined and enriched, as “new wine in the Father’s kingdom.”

We have no difficulty in anticipating the revival and perfection of the advantages resulting from the acts of religion. We think, with confidence, also, of the happiness to be enjoyed in a state of existence, in which every intelligent being will be pure, and in which nothing can be wrong; in which every affection will be good, and every virtue perfect; in which the image of the eternal God will be completely impressed on his rational offspring. We follow in our thoughts the unmixed delights, which are now enjoyed by “the spirits of just men made perfect;” and we can look forward, with sensible

emotion, to the time, when our faculties will not be inferior to theirs, or when we shall be enlightened and pure, like them.

But we are not to suppose, that the happiness of futurity is only to be derived from acts of religion, or from the possession of personal virtues; or that the condition of men in the eternal world, is to be so completely different from their present state, as to exclude the restoration or revival of any source of substantial happiness, enjoyed in this life, which is worthy of our rational nature.

It is certain that on this subject we cannot speak with precision or confidence; and that we can only form our judgment from such analogies, as are suggested by reason, or warranted by Christianity.

The most important occupations, and the most essential sources of happiness, which belong to good men, in the present world, have a direct relation to the world to come. They are designed to qualify them for occupations, or for enjoyments in the kingdom of God, much more excellent and refined, but not entirely dissimilar in their nature. The wine of the

Father's kingdom "is new," but still it is wine. It is adapted to the nature of man, and though of a far superior quality, has a certain relation or analogy, to that which he can relish or possess, in "the house of his pilgrimage."

We enter naturally into the happiness which we suppose to arise, in the invisible world, from the progress and perfection of the human mind. We anticipate, without an effort, the enjoyments resulting from the full exercise of our faculties, in their most perfect state, on the variety of the works of God. And why may we not suppose, that those who have, in this life, derived their chief delight, and their most important occupations, from the culture and exertion of their intellectual powers, will, in a more eminent degree, than men whose minds have been differently directed, derive from the same sources, both their peculiar employments, and the happiness resulting from them; after they shall have risen to a superior order of intelligent spirits, and shall be in a capacity to contemplate, with enlarged and vigorous faculties, the expanded and eternal glory, which is veiled from mortal eyes?

We can imagine, in like manner, that those who receive their chief satisfactions in this world, from the exercise of kind affections, or from good works; from the ardour with which they assist other men, or from their usefulness and fidelity in the Lord, will receive a proportional distinction and pre-eminence in the world to come. We can believe that this will be the fact, not merely in respect of the relation which the fulness of their reward will bear to their past service, but also, because their peculiar joys, in the kingdom of heaven, will result from the progress and perfection of the same general character, which distinguishes them in the present life; because they are destined to become the ardent and active instruments of happiness to other worlds, or will be permitted to assist the service, and to add to the enjoyments, of the blessed spirits, with whom they are at last to dwell.

In this view of the subject, it is natural to imagine, that the attachments and recollections of the present life will not be lost in the kingdom of heaven. The gospel uniformly connects the happiness of glorified saints, with their association together, and with the multitude of

those who are employed in the same occupations, or enjoy the same felicity. The apostles speak of those who are “their hope, their joy, their crown of rejoicing, their glory, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:” * And “they that be wise,” are affirmed “to shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, for ever and ever.” † Our Lord refers his disciples to the day when “he will drink new wine with them, in the kingdom of his Father;” and he transmits it as a fact to every age of the world, that, among those whom he selected for his personal intercourse on earth, there was one disciple, ‡ and one family, § whom he loved, with a peculiar kindness and affection.

These circumstances render it at least a probable, as it is a delightful, supposition, that those who have been endeared to us, by the affections of the present life, will be peculiar objects of our attention in a happier world. The chief felicity of glorified saints is no doubt derived

* 1 Thess. i. 19. 20.

† Dan. xii. 3.

‡ St John xiii. 23.

§ St John xi. 5.

from their communion with "the everlasting Father," "of whom are all things," and with "the only begotten of the Father, by whom are all things." Every individual creature, in "the Father's kingdom," will besides be qualified to promote the happiness of those with whom he is associated; and, bearing "the image of the invisible God," will himself be an object of general kindness and affection. But we are notwithstanding permitted, or naturally led, to believe, that those to whom we have been intimately united in the present life, and who are with us "partakers of the glory hereafter to be revealed," will be in a peculiar degree, or in a manner peculiar to themselves, the companions of our service, or the associates in our happiness.

The manner in which we are to exist, after the resurrection of the dead, may have more analogy to our present state, than we can now venture to affirm: And, on the other hand, it is equally certain, that many of the objects of our present affections, on which we set a value beyond their worth, and which we allow ourselves to regret in vain, will be ultimately lost to us, because they cannot enter into "the kingdom

of Christ and of God." But it is a sufficient consolation to believe, that all the happiness, which we have at present good reason, either to value or to regret, and which is capable, from its nature and substance, of being renewed in the invisible world, will be at last restored to us in a better form, than that in which we have enjoyed it in this life. We shall possess it without interruption for ever, incorporated with the views, and with the happiness of superior beings. Like the seraphims who execute the decrees of God, and proclaim his glory, we shall go to our appointed service with those, who are destined to take the most affectionate interest in our felicity. The fidelity, which was begun on earth, will be perfected in heaven; and the service, which is beyond the sphere of mortal beings, will be the signal of everlasting union and activity among the sons of God.

Let us now consider,

III. That this text reminds those who believe and obey the gospel, that though the time of their departure from this world should be near, when they must sleep in the dust of the earth, they are certain that their spirits will not die;

and that they shall awake "to glory and to an endless life," "in the kingdom of the Father."

It is wisely ordered by the constitution of our nature, and is necessary, both for the purposes of the present life, and for our effectual preparation for a higher state of existence, that every man should have a strong and a perpetual aversion to the dissolution of his body, and should also remain in ignorance of the time when he is to experience that event. We should not be qualified, either to fulfil our present duties, or to accomplish the ends of our probation, if we were not, on the one hand, impelled by our feelings to defend ourselves against the approaches of death; and did not believe, on the other, that our interests in this world are of sufficient importance and permanency, to excite both our ardour and our perseverance.

It is equally certain, and of equal importance to our essential duties, that every man receives perpetual admonitions of the uncertainty of the time allotted him in this world. In the progress of human life, we have an irresistible consciousness of our gradual approach to our last decline: And individuals, at very different pe-

riods, have still more direct intimations, that “the time of their departure is at hand.”

Strong impressions on this subject are of the most solemn kind ; and we are too apt to anticipate, with every melancholy reflection, the minute circumstances of our approaching dissolution. We consider, with irresistible impatience, that all that is now before our sight, will completely disappear ; that the light of day will close on us for ever ; that we shall leave behind us every object of our tenderness, and every thing in this world, which has ever occupied our thoughts or engaged our hearts ; that we shall go alone into the chambers of death, insensible and unconscious of every thing, wrapt up in the dust of the earth ; and that our bodies, dissolved and separated there, will be as completely mixed with the elements of matter, as if they had never had a relation to intelligent minds.

It is a dreadful reflection, if we had no consolation to balance it, that this scene of horror is preparing for us all ; and that no individual can have any security, that the time is not at hand, when it shall be fully realised in his own expe-

rience. From the aged it cannot be distant: But every one of us must know, that the summons to die, may reach us as effectually in the morning or in the vigour of life, as when it is not issued till the evening-tide.

The text was originally addressed to the apostles: "I say unto you, I will not henceforth drink of this fruit of the vine, untill that day when I drink it new with you, in my Father's kingdom." But if we can imagine it to be in any circumstances directed to ourselves, because "the time of our departure" is not distant, or because we have good reason to view our death as approaching, we are at least authorised to consider it, as holding out a consolation, sufficient to compensate to us for every humbling or awful circumstance, in the event of which it forewarns us. It says, that our spirits shall not die, although their "mortal tabernacle" is dissolved: It says, that our spirits shall continue to think, to act, and to enjoy, notwithstanding their separation from our bodily organs. It says, that our spirits shall pass directly, from their embodied state, into the presence of the Lord, to exist, where he is, "in his Father's kingdom." It says, that though, after the death of the body,

we must cease to exercise the senses, from which we derive our present knowledge of external nature, we shall find ourselves immediately surrounded by the glories of a greater world, and by a multitude of pure and glorious spirits, many of whom were once the companions of our pilgrimage in this world, who have gone before us to our Father's house. It says besides, that the most humbling circumstances in the dissolution of the body, do not leave us without the hope of its restoration. The resurrection of the dead, at the second "coming of the Lord" from heaven, when "all who are in their graves shall hear his voice," * is held out to us by the gospel, to render our prospects in the invisible world complete. Our bodies, raised from the dead, "spiritual and incorruptible," † "like to the glorified body of the Son of God," ‡ will be united for ever to our immortal spirits, "and so shall we be ever with the Lord." §

When I suppose the text to refer us to these consolatory views of death and futurity, I suppose the language in which it is expressed, to

* St John v. 28.

† 1 Cor. xv. 42. 44.

.. ‡ Philip. iii. 21.

§ 1 Thes. iv, 17.

be illustrated by the doctrine of "life and immortality, brought to light," and expanded by "the gospel."

Our knowledge on this subject cannot be minute, and must be confined to general facts. But why should we refuse to be comforted, or why should our hearts sink within us, though "the time of our departure" should be near? "We know that our Redeemer liveth," and that his dominion is greater than the powers of death and hell. We are certain that "he is risen from the dead," and "that he shall stand at the last day on the earth."§ His resurrection is both the pattern, and the assured pledge of ours. "We know," says an apostle, "that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus."¶ "We have not," therefore, "received the spirit of bondage or of fear; but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father:"* For "we are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus;" † "and if children, then heirs; heirs of God,

§ Job. xix. 25.

¶ 2 Cor. iv. 14.

* Rom. viii. 15.

† Galat. iii. 26.

and joint heirs with Christ; if so be, that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”*

The certainty of the immortality of the spirit, and of the resurrection of the dead, is supported by evidence as complete, as the nature of the subject admits of; and ought to afford those who believe the gospel most effectual consolations, under the sense of their mortality.

I have already said so much of the happiness of glorified spirits, and of their association together, after the resurrection of the dead, that it is not necessary to pursue this view of the subject farther.

But why should our minds be shaken, or why should our courage fail us, though the hour of our death should be approaching? “Our times are wholly in the hand of God.” It is of much more importance to every individual man, than length of days, or than any duration or degree of prosperity in this world, that, while he lives, “he should live by the faith of the Son of God,” in dutiful subjection to the Father of his spirit,

* Rom. viii. 17.

and “in the hope of eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord;” and that he should at last be able to adopt the language of the apostle, under the impressions of approaching death. “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing.”*

Death is only dreadful to those, who are far from God, and from “the way of peace:” To those, whose defect of principle, or whose violation of morals, demonstrates, that they are not the “heirs of the kingdom of God.” They “have no hope,” because “they are without God in the world.”

But death has no such terrors to those who believe and obey the gospel. “There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk, not after the flesh, but after the spi-

* 2 Tim. iv. 6. 7. 8.

rit.”* “They shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life.”† They die, to rise again: “They enter into peace: They rest in their graves:” ‡ Every one of them shall be found in his place at the last day.

“Now may the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered for a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen.” §

* Rom. viii. 1.

† St John iii. 16.

‡ Isaiah lvii. 2.

§ 1 Peter v. 10. 11

SERMON XIV.

ON THE

CULTIVATION OF PERSONAL RELIGION.

JUDE 20, 21.

“ But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life.”

“ IF a man love me,” said our Lord, “ he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”* The state of mind, which is the result of the influence of religion, is the source both of the purest conduct, and of the

* St John xvi. 2.

most substantial happiness, of which human nature is capable. He who preserves on his mind an habitual sense of his relation to God, and who derives from the will of God both the principle and the rule of his conduct, possesses the most enviable distinction, as well as the most precious enjoyments of this life. The favour of God compensates to him every external disadvantage, and enables him to sustain every external calamity.

But every good man has not the same consciousness of the favour of God, nor has even the same man the same reliance on it at every time. Our progress in personal religion is not uniform, and is certainly far from being equal. Our knowledge of ourselves is very different, as well as our fidelity in practical duties.

The state of mind into which vital religion introduces us, must be supported and steadily cultivated, in order to be effectually preserved. The spirit of religion and the consolations derived from it, must be cherished and confirmed by the means which Christianity prescribes ; and these we must learn to apply, both with fidelity and

earnestness, if “ we would keep ourselves in the love of God,” or enjoy the comfort which ought to result from the sense of it.

The admonition of the text is an illustration of this doctrine. The apostle supposes those, to whom it is addressed, to be in possession of the favour of God, “ through the sanctification of the spirit, and the belief of the truth ;” and he exhorts them to preserve and to guard their state of mind, by a faithful and conscientious application of the means, which this text represents in succession :

1. By a constant recourse to the great objects of their faith, from which they derive both their motives and their consolations.

2. By the habits of earnest prayer to God, animated by their reliance on his holy spirit.
And,

3. By an habitual confidence in the mercy of Christ, steadily supported, till the ends of their faith are attained.

By these means, faithfully employed, and sanctified by the blessing of God, the apostle supposes the spirit of practical religion to be effectually cultivated and maintained. “ Build-

ing up yourselves on your most holy faith, and praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life."

I shall endeavour to illustrate these different views of the subject.

I. In order "to keep ourselves in the love of God," we are required to have perpetual recourse to the great objects of our faith; from which we ought to derive both the motives of our conduct, and our personal consolations.

The faith which we embrace, and the sincerity with which we maintain it, must lie at the foundation of all practical religion. We worship and serve "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all," because we ascribe to him infinite and immutable perfections; because we believe in his supreme and universal sovereignty; because we know that we shall ultimately account to him for our conduct; and because we are fully persuaded, that he is "the rewarder of them who diligently seek him." Every idea of the influence of religion depends ultimately on the faith with

which we receive these essential doctrines, and on the sincerity and stedfastness with which we adhere to them.

In like manner, practical Christianity, while it involves, in its substance, our faith in God, and our absolute subjection to him, can only be the result of the faith of the gospel. We become the disciples of Christ, because we believe that, as “there is one God, there is one mediator betwixt God and man, the man Christ Jesus;” and that he is “the only begotten of the Father,” “by whom are all things;” that God sent his Son into the world, “that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life;” that he died to expiate our sins according to the Scriptures; and “to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;” and that he was raised from the dead by the power of God; that he is now “at the right hand of the majesty on high;” and “hath the keys of hell and death.”

On these facts the church of Christ is built: And we are his disciples, when we embrace the doctrine which depends on them, sincerely and without reserve, as the law of our lives, as well

as the foundation of our hopes; not only acknowledging the authority with which it is addressed to us, but earnestly solicitous to make a uniform, conscientious, and faithful application of it to its practical ends.

This is the faith, “the most holy faith,” on which alone practical Christianity can be built; and by means of which, “we keep ourselves in the love of God.” We rest on it our hopes and our consolations. We derive from it the great animating principle of all our fidelity.

We shall find the best illustrations of this doctrine, by attending to the minute experience of those, who make practical religion, and its influence on their personal conduct, the chief objects of their solicitude.

How does a man persuade himself, on good grounds, that he is in peace with God? “Not by works of righteousness which he has done;” nor by any conviction of his understanding, that he is either pure in heart, or free from sin. The degrees of personal guilt are as different, as the features which distinguish the countenances of individual men. But every man who consults his conscience, feels, that before God he is a

sinner, and, if he has deliberated dispassionately on the subject, that he has no personal resources for the expiation of sin. He is bound to repent of the sins, which he knows himself to have committed. But repentance, after sin, is as much the indispensable duty of the creature to the creator, as his obedience is, to any positive precept of the moral law; and can therefore no more create a claim of merit at the tribunal of God, for the forgiveness of sins, than a deed of charity can, before men, compensate the guilt of a flagrant injury.

Embracing the gospel, as the foundation of his hope and consolation, a man is in peace with God “not by works of righteousness which he has done,” but by means of his settled and deliberate faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as “the mediator betwixt God and man;” * and by means of the sincerity and firm resolution, with which he submits to his authority, and to the law which he has given us. †

He is in peace with himself, and is assured that he is in peace with God, when he proves

* 1 Tim. ii. 5. Rom. iii. 23—26. † Galat. ii. 20.

his faith by its practical influence on his conduct, and on the temper of his mind. He demonstrates his interest in the blessings of the gospel, by his fidelity in maintaining its spirit and authority.

The faith of Christianity, and its power over the conscience, is not only the chief principle of Christian morals, but the only legitimate source from which a good man can derive his internal tranquillity.

How is it then, that a faithful man is enabled to preserve his state of mind entire? "Building up himself on his most holy faith, he keeps himself in the love of God." He is perpetually recurring to the foundations of his faith and hope; to the sources of consolation on which he relies; to the mercy which assures him of peace with God; to the grace which is sealed to him by the blood of atonement; to the considerations by which he ought to guard his fidelity, arising from the strict account which he knows he must give of his conduct, at the tribunal of God; and to the help by which he believes himself to be prepared for every duty, and to be enabled to maintain every struggle required of him. His faith is therefore constantly acquiring an encrea-

sing vigour and confirmation ; and by applying it steadily to the various departments of his duty, he becomes every day purer in his conduct, and better assured of his interest in the source of purity and love.

By attending to the situations in which the strength of religious principle is most severely tried, we shall find the most striking examples of the efficacy of the faith, which is steadily cultivated for the purposes of practical religion, to sustain our courage and to promote our tranquillity.

The best of men have their hours of despondency, when their reflections on the imperfections of human nature, and on their personal infirmities, are combined with strong impressions of the account which they must render to God. Their present conduct cannot afford them considerations, on this subject, sufficient to satisfy their minds. But “ their most holy faith” which, on authority on which they have learned to rely, assures them of “ the grace which is brought unto us by the revelation of Jesus Christ,” effectually relieves their apprehensions, and both revives their courage, and restores their tranquillity. “ If God be for us,

who can be against us?—It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is ever at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”*

When they suffer most severely, either from personal afflictions, or from heavy disappointments in the present world, it is the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, and their reliance on the certainty of that which they believe, to which they immediately recur. By the views and considerations to which their faith directs them, they both adopt the language, and imbibe the spirit, of a firm and enlightened resignation. “We know that all things work together for good, to them who love God;” and, from a deliberate reliance on his wisdom, we can commit ourselves implicitly into his hands, and teach our hearts to say, “The will of the Lord be done.”

When they are exposed to dangerous temptations, which derive their strength from the known tendency, or from the peculiar temper of their minds, the faith of the gospel reminds them, how the Lord said to a disciple whose fide-

* Rom. viii. 31. 33. 34.

ty was put to the severest test, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not;" and, persuaded that the intercession of the Lord avails them also, in the hour of trial, "they take to themselves the whole armour of God."

When they are required by their peculiar situations, to give to the world eminent examples of "holy conversation and godliness," or of active virtues and of good works, they derive from "their most holy faith," both the principle which animates them, and the motives which determine their conduct. By "simplicity and godly sincerity;" by purity "unspotted from the world;" by the "love which is not easily provoked, which vaunteth not itself, and which seeketh not its own;" by the "charity which thinketh no evil, which hopeth and believeth all things," and which is "the perfect bond;" by earnestness and patience in the good works which they have the means of fulfilling, they glorify God in this world, and "lay up for themselves a good foundation against the time to

come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”* They demonstrate, by its practical effects, what the faith of the gospel can accomplish, by means of those who sincerely embrace it, for the honour and advantage of human life ; while it is the chief, or comparatively the only, solicitude which occupies their thoughts, that their talents may not be unemployed in their natural sphere, and that they may at last be accounted worthy to receive this decisive intimation, that their service is accepted, from him who “ shall judge the quick and the dead ;” “ I know your works and charity, and service, and faith, and patience ; and the last to be more than the first.” †

The defects of human nature adhere to our best fidelity in practical duties. But “ faith purifieth our hearts,” and by “ works is faith made perfect.”

The faith which supports a good man’s courage, and animates his labours through life, will not desert him when he must close the scene. His decline has its consolations, as well as the vigour of his life : and he is not afraid of

* 1 Tim. vi. 19.

† Rev. ii. 19.

death, for he can look with the confidence of hope beyond it. When he perceives the last and solemn hour approaching, if his faculties are entire, "his most holy faith" is the strength of his heart: and though he is not destitute of the feelings either of a mortal, or of an imperfect, creature, he can deliberately prepare for his last summons, and believe that he shall depart in peace," "having seen the salvation of God."

These different exemplēs represent to us the manner, in which a firm believer of the gospel is accustomed to apply the objects of his faith minutely, to their practical ends. His faith acquires, by exercise and habit, both strength and stability; and has more and more the command of his mind and affections: And therefore, no means more effectual can be represented, by which he can cultivate the influence and progress of personal religion, or "keep himself in the love of God." The application of his faith and hope to every department of his duty, and to every concern of time and of eternity, renders his communion with God perpetual; and, effectually prepared by the considerations which he derives from the gospel, to which he is con-

stantly recurring, both to do and to suffer all the will of God, "he grows in grace," and in conformity to the image of the Son of God, being "fruitful in every good word and work."

By attending to the means, by which a good man preserves his state of mind, we may readily perceive, on the other hand, in what circumstances we relinquish the spirit of vital religion, or lose the sense of communion with God. We do not "keep ourselves in the love of God," when "we live by sight, and not by faith;" when we allow ourselves to receive our leading views, or our chief satisfactions, rather from the world of sense, than from the objects of our faith and hope, or from our fidelity in our peculiar duties; and, when our predominant motives and resources are taken, not from the spirit or the laws of religion, but from the spirit and the manners of the world.

A man, who is no stranger to the faith of the gospel, may fall into this state of mind, when he is imperceptibly betrayed, through the deceitfulness of sin, to listen to the maxims, or to become familiar with the vices of worldly men; when he neglects the views and resources, with which

religion furnishes him, and, without having recourse to them, attempts to find all his personal enjoyments in the objects around him ; when he ceases to cultivate the hopes and impressions, which he derives from religion, and builds no longer his tranquillity on “ his most holy faith.”

A man may fall into this state of mind, before he is aware, and, when he experiences it, he has every unhappy consequence to apprehend from its progress. The faith of a Christian, and the snares of the world, are in perpetual opposition to each other : And he who is conscious that he has lost much of the spirit of religion, by his neglect of the means by which it requires to be cultivated, or by his deliberate familiarity with the manners of the world, with which it must ever be at variance, has good reason to listen, with deep humiliation and awe, to the admonition given by our Lord to the church of Sardis ; “ I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember there-

fore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.*

From the views which I have given of this branch of the subject, we cannot fail to observe the inseparable connection betwixt the peculiar faith of a Christian, and the spirit and substance of vital Christianity. Where would be the religion of a man, such as I have represented a Christian to be, if he were deprived of the peculiar views and impressions, which he receives from his faith in the blood of atonement; in the mercy of God, or in the grace which is given us, by Christ Jesus; in the resurrection of the Son of God from the dead; in his perpetual dominion in heaven and earth; in “the judgement of the great day;” and in the certainty and glories of “the Father’s kingdom,” after “the times of the restitution of all things?” Independent of these great objects of his faith, from what source could a Christian man derive either his motives or his consolations? Or where could he find the weapons of his warfare? Every affection of his mind, as a Christian, depends on the substance of his faith. Take

* Rev. iii. 1. 2. 3.

this away, and he has neither motives, resources, nor affections, to distinguish him from men, who find all their happiness in the present world.

We ought to observe besides, that the spirit of this world will never lead men to God, or persuade them, either to seek, or to desire, his favour. If we are indeed the disciples of Christ, it is by the faith of the gospel, and by its living power; by the stedfastness, the energy, and the purity, which our affections and our whole conduct derive from it; that we either possess this distinction, or can preserve it. “We build up ourselves on our most holy faith,” and therefore “we keep ourselves in the love of God.”

Let us now consider,

II. That good men are represented, in this text, as preserving their state of mind, by means of the habits of earnest prayer to God, animated by their reliance on his holy spirit: “praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God.”

The meaning of the language, in this text, is explained by the apostle Paul in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. “The spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what

we should pray for, as we ought ; but the spirit itself maketh intercession for us, (or within us,) “ with groanings (or, with an earnestness) which cannot be uttered,” (or, which cannot always be expressed in words.)*

The exhortation of the text supposes, that the continued habits of earnest prayer, in which good men are assisted and animated by the spirit of God, are essential means of their progress in vital religion : And that they are of great importance to preserve the state of mind, which is the result of faith and godliness ; both to maintain their communion with God, and their sense of his favour.

Our prayers cannot be necessary to explain our situations to God, to whom every circumstance which relates to them is intimately known. But they are of great importance to ourselves ; to preserve on our minds a perpetual sense of our dependence on God ; to keep constantly open the channel of communion with the Father of our spirits ; and, by means of our earnestness to obtain the blessings, which are the

* Rom. viii. 26.

subjects of our prayers, to cultivate the impressions and affections, by which the spirit of vital religion is supported and confirmed.

We are not influenced or determined by our understandings alone. Our firmest persuasion would not be effectual to attain the ends of our faith, if it were not constantly assisted by the effects of devotion. "The prayer of faith" has far more energy, than our most deliberate convictions. When our fervent desires are embodied with the faith, which assures us that our prayer will be heard before the throne of God, it is then, above all, that "we are filled with peace and joy in believing, and abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

The effect of earnest devotion may be ascertained, by means of every subject to which it relates.

We implore the mercy, or the help, which our peculiar situations require. If our prayer comes from our hearts, we feel, at the moment when we utter it, how great our personal weakness is, and how precious our dependence on God; how inestimable the blood of atonement to a sinful man; how gracious the pardon

which is freely given, and which shall never be recalled ; how infinitely consolatory it is to believe, that “ our heavenly Father will give the holy spirit to them who ask him.”

The earnestness of our prayer, as often as we renew it, is the seal of these important truths on our hearts ; and, if we are in the habit of fervent devotion, it is the pledge of the solicitude with which we follow them out through life. We rise from prayer, to watchfulness, and to trust in God. If we believe that we are heard with favour “ at the throne of grace ;” we are more than ever determined to devote our talents to our duties, and “ to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.”

There is a peculiar energy in fervent prayers. When we feel more than common anxiety to obtain particular mercies to ourselves, or to those in whom we are deeply interested, our solicitude is chastened and sanctified by the faith and confidence with which we commend our desires to God. We are prepared by the affections which our devotion excites and confirms, to receive, as the gift of love, the blessing which we have implored : or, if

that blessing is denied us, we are prepared to find the answer given us from heaven, in the reverence with which we are enabled to contemplate the decision of God, as the result of kindness as well as of wisdom : and, in this case, we look back on our prayer, as the means by which we have attained the resignation, which teaches us to say from our hearts, “ good is the will of the Lord :” “ Not our will, but thine be done.”

When “ the candle of the Lord” ceases “ to shine on our tabernacle,” and “ we lie down in sorrow,” under the pressure of aggravated affliction, prayer is our resource and our consolation. It is a precious resource, when we feel that the hand of God is on us, and come to him with faith and submission, as “ partakers of the sufferings of Christ ;” committing ourselves to his counsels, and imploring the help which can only come from him. Our communion with heaven is close indeed, when our afflictions are the signal for prayer, and effectually teach us to bless the name of the Lord ; And when, under the heaviest pressures, we find the result of our prayers in “ the peace of God, which keeps the heart and mind by Christ Jesus.”

But the admonition of the text does not merely relate to cases, in which the earnestness of prayer is the effect of extraordinary difficulties or calamities. It supposes prayer to be the habitual resource, as well as the most salutary employment, of a good man, in his usual state of mind. He, who makes personal religion the business of his life, finds a subject of prayer in every thing which interests him. From every situation, he looks up to God, as his kind and merciful Father in Christ; as the author of all his blessings, whose kindness and forbearance have never forsaken him; from whom he derives every cheering hope and expectation; to whom he is indebted for all the consolations which have hitherto supported him; and in whom he feels himself bound to place the most unreserved confidence, with regard to all that is to come.

It should require no laboured deduction, to convince us of the practical effects of earnest and habitual prayer. He, “who lives by the faith of the Son of God,” and who finds perpetual delight and consolation in believing, that Christ “appears in the presence of God for us,” and

that " whatsoever we ask of the Father in his name," * we shall receive, is animated by prayer and thanksgiving, in every pure motive, in every good work, in every hour of temptation, in every branch of his preparation for the happiness of a perfect world. His persuasion that he lives " in the communion of the Son and of the Father," gives a charm to every external situation in the present life, and sheds a light around its worst calamities. He perseveres in his active duties with a stedfast resolution, and fulfills them with alacrity and zeal, because he is " sanctified by the Holy Ghost," and " by prayer."

If any proof were requisite, that these are truly the practical effects of earnest and habitual devotion, we have only to consider the situation of those who do not pray: or of those, who, from the intercourse and bustle of the world, lose the spirit and the ardour of prayer. Their deadened souls, laid open to every worldly affection, agitated by every worldly interest, conscious of the pernicious impression of every strong temptation, are imperceptibly more and more alienated from every object

* St John xvi. 23.

of their faith and hope, and have every day less dependence on them. They feel, as if every successive period of time served to diminish their expectations from God, their solicitude to obtain his favour, and their reliance on the hope of salvation. They know much more of the dread, than of the awe, of God; although they are most unwilling to examine minutely their reflections on this subject. If they attempt, in this state of mind, to pray, it is without persuasion or earnestness. If they do not pray at all, they are far indeed from "life and peace."

This representation will apply, in many points, to the criminal defection of a Christian, as well as to him who is farther still from prayer. But the situations of both demonstrate, that without prayer, men cannot be in the communion of God; and that, by means of prayer, deadened, interrupted, and habitually neglected, a deep wound is given to the best affections of the human soul, to its best capacities for active duties, and to its most important and most permanent interests.

Whether we have the experience of these truths, or only know them to be verified by the

experience of other men, they ought to bring forcibly home to our consciences our personal obligation, "to watch unto prayer." "The prayer of faith" will heal the sickened soul. He who "had fallen from his first love," and from "his first works," and who returns to God, "praying in the Holy Ghost," will find, in the sincerity and the fervour of his heart, the signals of effectual revival.

On the other hand, he who "prays without ceasing," "according to the grace which is given him," "keeps his heart with all diligence," and "goes from strength to strength." The vigilance which guards and preserves him, is supported by his dependence on God: and his faith will not fail, when his heart is faint. "He shall have life, and shall have it more abundantly,"* "till he obtains the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory." †

I have still to consider,

III. That good men are represented in this text, as preserving their state of mind, by means of an habitual confidence in the mercy of Christ,

* St John x. 10.

† 2 Tim. ii. 10.

steadily supported, till the ends of their faith are attained. "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life."

In the best state of our minds, we must be conscious of our absolute and perpetual dependence on the mercy of God, without which, as sinful and fallible men, we could neither possess hopes nor consolations. But, that the awe of the infinite majesty of the everlasting God may not overwhelm us, the gospel holds out to us the mercy of Christ, in whom the human nature is united to "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" in order to give us a perpetual pledge of the kindness and tender mercy of God, equally adapted to our infirmities, and to the present condition of our faculties.

The exhortation of this text supposes, that, by relying on "the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ," amidst all the weakness which adheres to us, even in our nearest approaches to purity of conduct, till we are at last made perfect, in the possession of eternal life, "we keep ourselves in the love of God," and are able to preserve the sense of it.

It is only experience which illustrates this doctrine ; our personal experience, in different situations, of the effects of our reliance on the mercy of Christ.

When we take a deliberate and dispassionate review of the state of our minds, and of our personal conduct, we must always be conscious, that, in comparison with the means and talents which have been given us, we have done little indeed, for the advantage of the world, for the substantial interests of morals or of religion, or for the glory of God among mankind. We cannot disguise to ourselves our conviction of the duties, which we know we have deliberately neglected : Nor is it possible for us to forget the situations, in which the duties which we have best discharged before the world, have been either performed without their proper motives, or polluted by motives to which we cannot reconcile even our own minds. When we add to these recollections, our consciousness of the positive errors and sins, for which our own hearts condemn us, notwithstanding our firmest resolutions, and even after our best repentance, it is only our reliance on “ the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

which can reconcile us to ourselves, or which can afford us satisfactory reasons for believing, that we are in peace with God. We look with faith and earnestness to Christ, the mediator with God for us; certain of his sympathy, for "he was tempted in all points, as we are tempted, though he was without sin." We know that "he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities," * and therefore we believe, that he is ready to help us, in all our temptations. Our reliance on his kind and continued compassion revives our ardour, or supports it, in every good work; and effectually persuades us, that God hath mercy on us, by the Son of his love. "We look to the mercy of Christ," and commit ourselves to him; and we lift our eyes, with humble confidence and hope, "to his Father and our Father, and to his God, and our God." †

In the furnace of affliction, we know the full effects of our reliance on the compassions of the Lord. The trial is severe, and flesh and blood will shrink before it, when the external blessings, which we most value, are taken away, or our

* Heb. iv. 15.

† St John xx. 17.

means of enjoying them. “Our faith, more precious than gold which perisheth, is tried with fire.”* But “in the midst of the fire, we see one like unto the Son of God.” We hear him say again, what he said to his disciples when he left them in the world; “I will pray the father, and he will give you another comforter, who will abide with you for ever.” †

We look to the mercy of Christ, and to his perpetual intercession for us, in the time of sorrow, under the pressure of temptation, when our resources or when our spirits fail, when our faith is shaken, or when our courage is exhausted. The assurance of his kind attention to our interests, “before the Majesty on high,” is the pledge of consolations, which will never fail. Certain of the efficacy of his intercession, we are sure “that God will not forsake the works of his own hands,” ‡ and that “we are kept by the favour of God through faith unto salvation.” §

Good men preserve their state of mind, and support their ardour in their peculiar duties, by means of their confidence “in the mercy of

* 1. Peter, i. 7.

† St John, xiv. 16.

‡ Psal. cxxxviii. 8.

§ 1 Peter, i. 5.

Christ," through all the successive stages of their pilgrimage in this world. "Having loved his own, he loves them to the end," and "keeps them in the love of God." "They love his appearing," and prepare for it. He follows them constantly, with his eye of kindness and compassion. His mercy sanctifies their departure from this world, and fortifies their courage, till their last struggle is over. It follows them beyond the grave; and, when they shall hereafter stand together before his judgement-seat, they shall there find the justice of the Judge, tempered with the mercy of the Saviour. Eternal life will then be their's: All will then be perfect: and mercy itself will be swallowed up in love.

The admonition which I have endeavoured to illustrate, contains a most important rule, which ought to govern our whole lives.

Personal religion is to be "built up on our most holy faith." But "faith without works is dead;" and the ends of practical Christianity are not attained, if the great objects of our faith and hope are not habitually and minutely applied, to the various departments of our peculiar duties, and

if they are not steadily opposed to all the pernicious influence of the sensible world. The weakness of human nature will not permit us to rest our conduct, either on the clearest convictions of the understanding, or on the best intentions of the mind. But the prayer of faith, which becomes our habit and our resource, will inspire us with a fortitude and perseverance in our duties, above our natural strength, and with "good hope through grace," which will not desert us in our greatest struggles. Personal religion is the most important interest of human life, and ought to be the object of our first solicitude. Our comfort, even in this world, and every estimable quality which we are capable of attaining, depend on it. He who is known to make "pure and undefiled religion" the chief concern and the indispensable rule of his life, is not only happy in his own mind, but is an object of general confidence and esteem, even when his natural endowments have not been great. On the other hand, the power of vital godliness, not only habitually and earnestly cultivated by the faith of the gospel,

* 1. Thes. i. 10.

and by the continued intercourse of the mind with God, but visibly illustrated by purity of conduct, and by the active virtues of a useful life, will give splendour and dignity to the most conspicuous talents, and happiness to the worst conditions of mankind.

But the effects of religion, in this world, constitute but a small part of the blessings which we derive from it. It is the hope of eternal salvation "by Jesus Christ our Lord," which raises Christianity far above every other object of the human mind; and the means by which we attain or even preserve this "blessed hope," are entitled to our first and most sedulous attention, during the whole extent and progress of human life.

Christianity adds to all our consolations this precious assurance, that the imperfection of human attainments will not deprive us, either of the comfort resulting from the hope of the gospel, or of the final possession of eternal life. If "we keep ourselves in the love of God," waiting for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead; even Jesus "who hath delivered us from the wrath to come;" the ten-

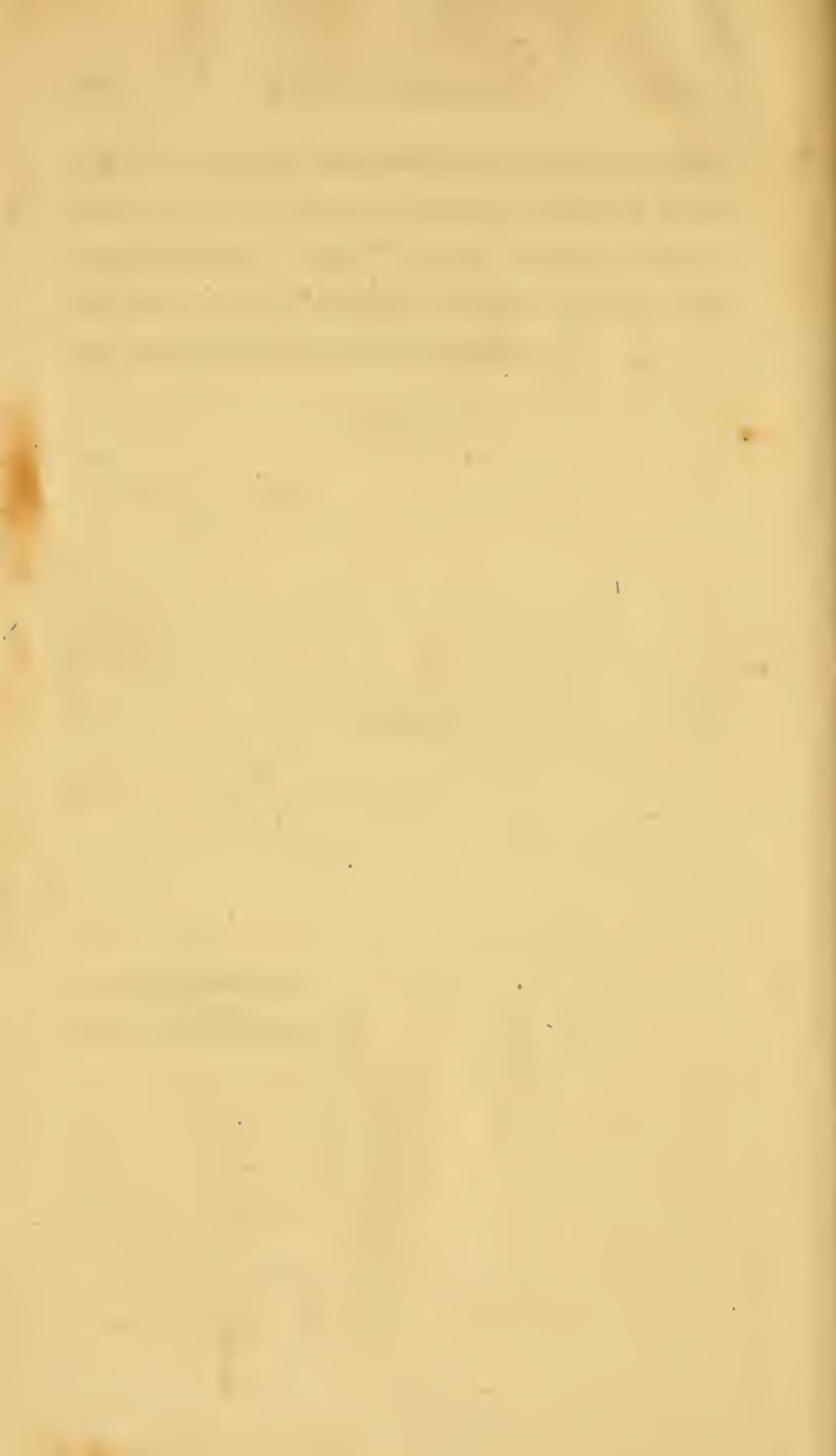
der mercy of our compassionate Redeemer shall console us, till we are for ever released from our infirmities : And “ in him, though now we see him not, believing, we shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” *

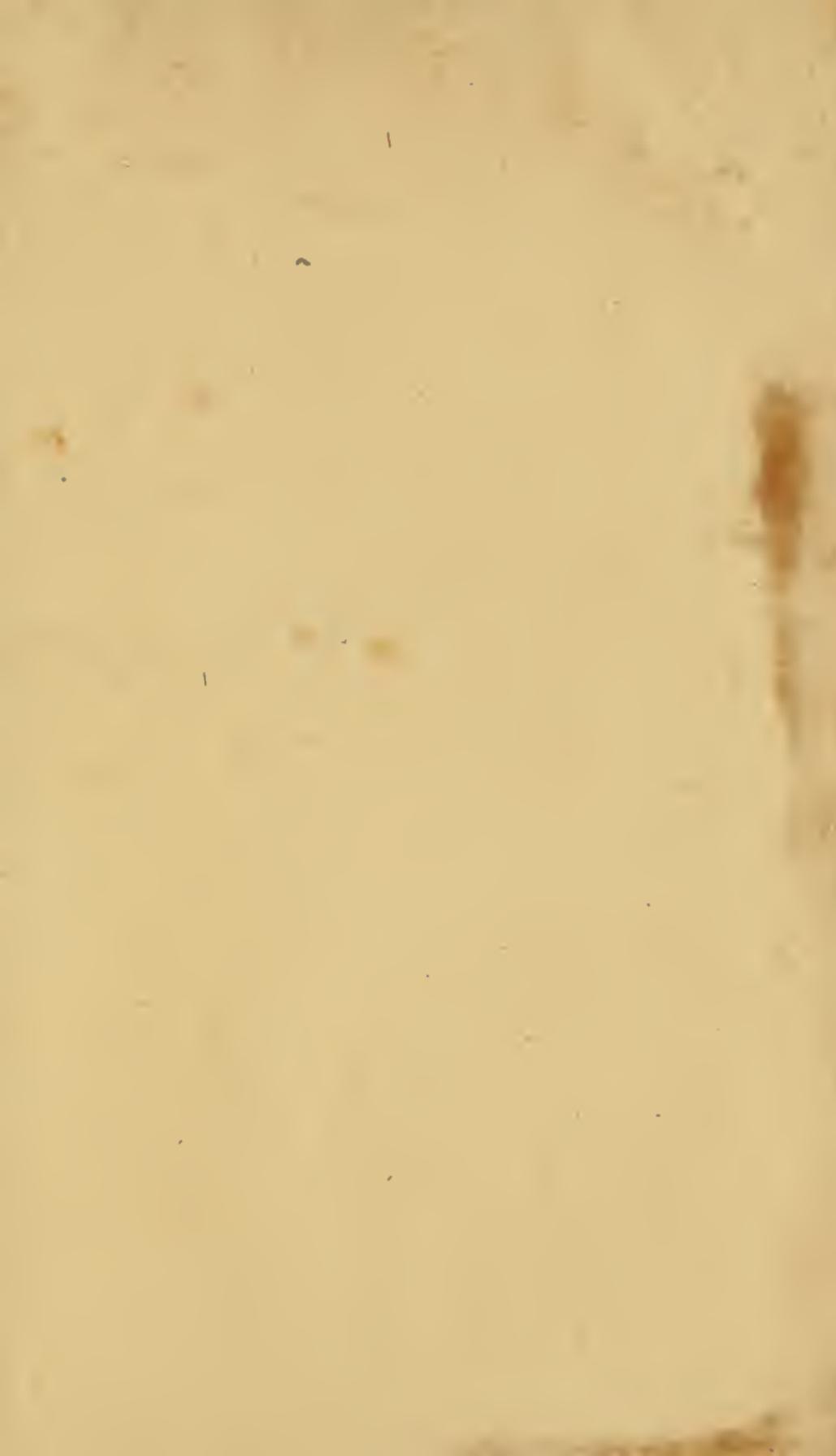
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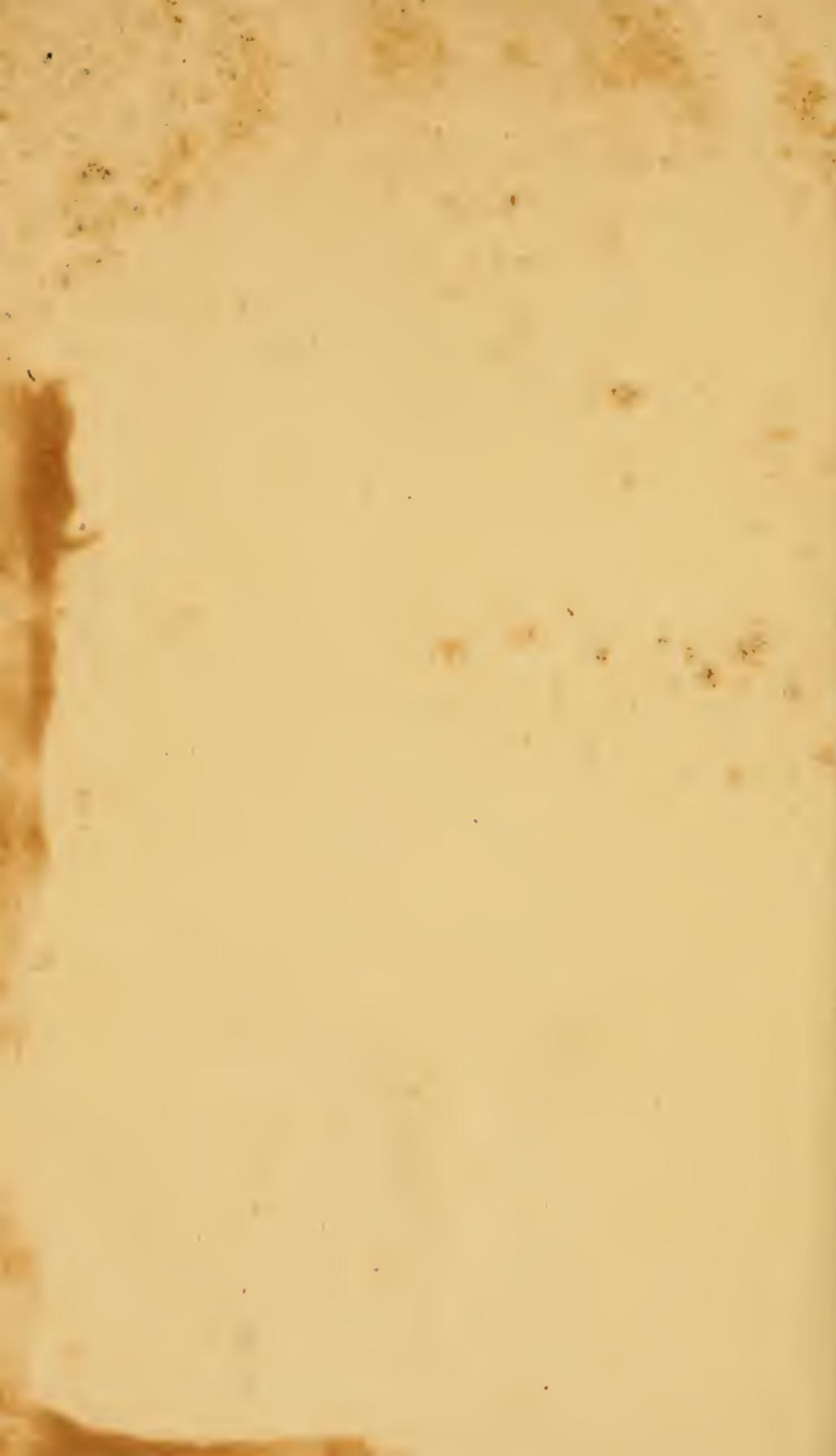
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